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sint stephen canada,
polyphemus' cave
and the Boobieland
Express

a novel by
claudio janora

\$8.50

Stephen Canada is a great sinner, a kind of saint of sinning, and a wild outsider in a Boobieland world that moves past him in a blur like an express train. In churchy sinning Toronto he finds loving enemies who give him money and obscure his soul with sad sex, violence, drugs.

His marriage to Myra breaks up as she tries to find refuge in a kibbutz in Israel, and he looks for salvation in violence, death and at last the voice of God speaking to him in disillusioning paradoxes that urge him to a bitter reconciliation with living.

Claudio Ianora writes with wild comedy and bitter ingenuousness. His concern is love, man's soul, holiness, but he is never sentimental. Stephen Canada's life is the frustrations many young people feel today as they try to live the ideals of peace and love. Claudio Ianora was born in Italy and moved to Canada where he now lives, near Emsdale, north of Toronto. He is writing another book.

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Claudio Janora

new press 1970

to live

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One

Aris Buckney sat in a corner. Big frame slumped in a grey chair, eyelids half closed and the white of his eyes swivelling in the sockets like maggots under the skin. He took another puff from the slender weed and held his breath for thirteen seconds like he was developing the negative of his soul. Aristides sitting half Atman half beast lost somewhere in the horizon of the mind, listening to my howling, me the timber wolf and he the moon.

"Aris, listen to me will you!?"

"I'm listening Steve. I'm listening."

Hot vaginal summer out there in Croesus ass-land. Bodies sweating in circumcised tombs of the mind. Guys and dolls out there moving slowly like marsupial embryos in cellophaned freedom. Arses on special today. The Loblaw kind. If there is a choice today it must be either liberty or tail. Must want both. They want ass and freedom. And the two of us in dinginess of soul and surrounding, in a dark basso below street level, poking at the dead putrefied rat we gave joybirth on the cement floor.

"I tell you Aris, never marry for cash. Don't even sell your paintings, or art, buy all you can for cheap money but don't sell Aris. Don't sell!"

"And this Quebecoise asked me, are you Catholic? Good Lord yes! Ah then it's all right. You never saw anybody catch a handful of kleenex so fast. She'd shoot out of me like it was bullets coming, no kidding, and she'd always bring the kleenex back in time. She would have me think that it was all right because I was a Catholic. And with protestants it would be sin for sure.

So as long as we didn't make God sad and didn't stain Mrs. Lafayette's bedspread we were all right. Then there was Louise. I have to tell you about Louise some day."

"Louise who?"

"Louise I don't know who. I don't remember."

"What about her?"

"That's what I'd like to know. She was a virgin."

"What's that?"

Hot out, a trapezoid of light shooting down on the floor from the stairwell and a fly or two zigging in and out of the light and shade, appearing and disappearing as they do, while Stephen tries nervously and unsuccessfully to cease the trigonometrical effort of his ears which fastidiously elect to follow the buzzing segments of flight without visual coordinates. Heat coming down the stairs too.

"Should I close the door Aris. May be a bit cooler."

"Dark as gut though."

"Turn the light on!"

"Doesn't work."

Stephen on his feet, flicking the light switch, then turning his attention to the light bulb hanging in the middle of a spidery ceiling.

"Why don't you buy a bulb?"

"I will."

Aristides' granite face with an acropolic look, curls of Zeus upon his statuesque head and lips twisting to suck out the last breath of placentean nurture of the soul from the burning butt.

"Anyway I'll never marry for money again."

"How did you get her to raise your allowance?"

"I picketed in front of our building."

Oh, oh, and a slap of the knee, eyes of Aris on me through the smoldering sediments of defeat and years.

"I wrote it on a placard, banged it on a broom stick and walked in a tiny circle in front of the building until she came home."

Aris face busted open with joy. Lungs blasting away

heart's liquefying thunder. Tears even. A grin cracking with pain the sralagmitic spear of gloom growing within the superintestinal self. God's ghostly sperm dripping on the deserted sands of our soul and the two of us lost and sold in the merriment of death's charming embrace, laughing in the dark and dusty unconsciousness of a blind miracle. Don't look at the sun, son! Years later I learned that I could prove to myself Cartesianly that I *was*, without a question of a doubt. What excitement. I AM! I AM! Good lord! What?

"What?"

"What what?"

"What did you write on your placard for Pete's sake?"

"I'm thy Lord, thy God. . . ."

"Go on, go on!"

"Thou shalt have no God before me."

"Oh come on for crying out loud, what the hell did you have on your sign?"

"*Local One-two-o-o on strike. Demanding connubial benefits. That's on both sides of the blasted cardboard.*"

Aris blowing to pieces. Stephen watching him and cocking his head like a pigeon running the mile. Canvas-ses splattered with paint, rusty odours and leaning back on his grey rocker, laughing, Aris shakes the mural of cardboard boxes which serves as a partition for his sleeping and mating habits. One C.P.R. blanket hanging as a door over the knifed doorway.

"She had a haemorrhage when she saw me, in front of the building and what have you. Fancy place with fancy tenants and us occupying the penthouse with labour trouble or something. She got so red in the face it nearly burned the tips of my long eyelashes."

"Oooooo! Ooohh!"

"I wish I had thought of it long ago. I'm getting three hundred a month now and I'm already thinking of going on strike again. Only I don't want to push her hard, I don't know what she might do."

"God you are resourceful." Aris still laughing, getting

off the chair to turn a hot plate on under the greasy kettle. Taking a telescopic look through a jar of instant coffee, and then shaking it, scraping it with a dirty spoon and dividing the issuing dust between two jag-chipped mugs. Feeble voices dropping down from the hot pavement like alphabet noodles raining on the ears, merely wetting the buds of notion. Background noises, for one resourceful sitting in a basement with nothing better to do but watch a stout, red-haired, coarse-grained earthling moving slowly about his ground like a spawning fish.

"Why don't you move in with me Steve? Three hundred dollars will go a long way around here!"

"Like hell! Anyway she doesn't dish it all out a month in advance you know."

Aris with a teaspoon hanging from his big bony red-haired hand.

"No?"

"No, hell no! She leaves me ten dollars every morning on the table."

"You're kidding."

"Yeah, kidding. She figures I can't go very far with that, and that way I can never spend more."

"Holy! What a bitch!"

"Hell, three hundred dollars wouldn't last me a day."

"That's what I mean. What a bitch!"

Aris with his big clubby hands and meaty arms settling a steaming mug on Stephen's leg and slurping some of the hot Brazil piss with a noise akin to the day of creation when Canada was bubbling oozing hot shit. Uncultured soul this man Aris, a man without love or hate, a man of simple unhellenic yet powerful reason which somehow enables him to see life as his own existence only, neither terrible nor beautiful, only inevitable. A man at peace no doubt. I envy him so much I crave to convert him to my suffering because I cannot enjoy his type of peace.

"Maybe you ought to give *it* to her more often

Steve."

"Up her corrugated arse!"

"Z-z-z-z!"

"I'll leave her the day that I become rich and famous."

"You are welcome here anytime."

"You'd kick me out again!"

"Probably, but I mean well. Your suffering gets on my nerves after a while. Any suffering gets on my nerves after a while. Steve me boy, you go about life like an open grave."

"It will be different when I'm rich and famous."

"Meanwhile I suggest you kill somebody. Let your poison flow out. I suggest you kill someone nice. Not your wife, maybe a little old lady, with a hammer."

Chipped mug flying across the room, over Aris's turtled head, ripping a hole in the cardboard partition and crashing invisibly in the other room. Stephen a roaring charging minotaur colliding with the big frame of Aris who was trying desperately to get out of his track and the two of them catapulting over the rocker crashing through sticks of wood and cardboard partition, tearing down everything in their path like a human avalanche.

"You sonamabitch."

"Ahhh. Oooo, ooo. Don't you ever squeeze my balls again."

"Look what you have done to my room."

"Jesus that hurts."

Aristides brought the chair up from the debris and sat on it again watching Stephen tramping and kicking the cardboard on the floor.

"I wish you wouldn't do that everytime. Every time you come in here you rear a wall down."

"You just about flattened my boobies you Abyssinian commie."

"What the hell are you looking for?"

"My wallet damn it."

"What's in it?"

"Two bucks."

"Who's going to clear up all this mess now?"

"I found it!" Stephen retrieved a black wallet and checked the contents. Gingerly stepped over part of the partition still standing on crate studs like a jagged piece of kamikazied ship, and went to sit facing Aris as if nothing had happened.

Sitting in silence. Silent void of disembowelled dreams while voices and sounds from out there Boobieland, drop into emptiness like coins in a cavernous inaccessible piggy-bank. Music like a dripping cave and wind blowing through the ribs of a skeleton propped against a rocky wall, in the dark. The dark. A million mounted knights pursuing their mythical dragons, out there in Boobieland, and a million million Panchos following their noble leaders. Let us move forward! Hip-hip-hurray! Forward to Boobieland land of blissful doom.

Forward my imperial hemorrhoids. There are two worlds out there, mine and theirs, but mine doesn't exist or I can't find it. Except in bed. I suppose in the battlefield too. Here let me hold a tit in my hand, just one please sweet stranger from the other world, you have got two.

Nosir you can't have it! Though I'm on the pill I must know your intentions Sir Stephen. Stranded in a pillular world without the password. Is it love? Liberty? Peace? I don't know. But here I have this thing full of jewels and joy, let me put it in your little box.

"It'll surely be different when I'm rich and famous."

"That's what you think."

"That's what I want to think. Dreams were hung in front of me like a merciless carrot. So dumb Rosinante lives another day, and crazy Quixote out there gets another little ride. But truth will come someday like a pin to a balloon. And there will be nothing left not even the memory of the sound of the wind in a dark cave."

"I'll be more selective then."

Aris yawned, nodded, poked his ear with a long

finger nail, crossed his eyes on the tip of the finger to see the wax, then started rocking again on his chair.

"You don't believe me?"

"I'll tell you one thing."

"Yeah! What, what?"

"I'll eat my ass if you ever do!"

"You would? I mean you would really do that for me?"

"Damn right I would, I figure it must be easy compared to what you have to do to make me do it."

"Don't discourage me now. I figure it's the only way to lead a natural life and meet with an unnatural death. And I just have to have a natural life at least. Any kind of life as a matter of fact. For crying out loud Aris, do you have any idea what it is like to be alive?"

"No. I'm too busy trying to stay alive to have the time to find out what it is like."

"That's what I mean. Exactly! Now what I want is just a little time or means to do just that."

"You might do it cheaply, by poverty, purity and renunciation or something or other."

"Don't give me that bag-of-vita stuff."

"Or you can go into seclusion."

"Come on, be serious."

"You won't find it in fornication which is on your mind."

"Fornication is in the beholder. My mind is under glass my dear Aris, I peer to see what's in it but all I see is reflections. I haven't the foggiest idea what really is in my mind."

"Fornication mainly."

Stephen got up and walked to the door. "You are a bit obsessed."

"I won't deny that. Where are you going?"

"I'm getting out of here. It's depressing."

Aris joined him up on the sidewalk. They stood a minute grinning and glaring at each other like dogs, then Aris's face opened up in a great smile, he grabbed

Stephen with his huge arms and kissed him on both cheeks. Somebody behind them ululated like a goosed owl. Aris shoved Stephen out of his way, lifted his fist straight up in the air and revved up a propeller action before he charged across the sidewalk towards a pair of scrambling hippies. He caught one by the shirt just inside the doorway and pulled him back onto the sidewalk for execution. Fist still milling in the air, Stephen watching while a little crowd gathers around. Little guy on his knees pleading for his life to be spared as Aris's fist comes down on his head like a mallet. Somebody leaped on him from behind and started climbing his back, another one hung himself to the fisted arm and was elevated off the pavement as Aris brought his fist up in the air again. Suddenly just before the fist started to come down, while the guy on his back had put his arms around Aris's head and the one hanging from his forearm started yelling *stop* like he was directing traffic, Stephen leaped into action delivering a conversion kick into Aris's belly. There was a great roar and scrambling of feet to safety so that Aris and Stephen were left inside a widening circle of spectators, glaring at each other like mad bulls while the executed guys crawled away between their feet. Aris's fist was revving up in the air again when somebody yelled cops. Arm came down immediately, spanned Stephen's shoulder in an amicable crunch and they walked down the sidewalk laughing. Not a sign of violence.

"I wish we hadn't been interrupted Steve."

"I really hate violence Aris."

"Like hell you do."

But I do really. Gentle nature in me, now when he suggested the gory murder of a little old lady back there, I could have killed him. Same when he started pounding that fellow on the head. I just go berserk about violence. Wars upset me tremendously, especially those wars in which I can associate myself with the aggressor. It really depresses me no end to be faced with a large scale

manifestation of my own nature for which I'm not directly responsible. There I'm trying to be a good boy and somebody has to remind me all the time of the things I can do. I guess I'm mean really, but not violent. Aris instead is like a storm, no meanness in it whatsoever just a lot of destroying energy. As a kid I used to promise God I'll try and be better. I would think about the mean things I had thought in the day and I would really feel bad about it. I was a wide-eyed kid really. You know the kind, with great big brown eyes constantly being amazed at one thing or another. For a while I really wanted to become a saint. I used to go around blessing people on the street. God bless you! Just like that! At first I just mumbled it under my breath, but later on I actually got enough courage to stop people on the sidewalk and bless them. I really stumped a lot of them. A few thought I should get a good spanking.

What are you? Some sort of a smart alec?

Nosir I'm not being fresh. I love you that's all.

I ought to swat you one.

Some really got mean, upset maybe. Anyway I got around to bless the whole rotten bunch until it was brought to my family's attention and my dad took me under his arm and put me straight.

Son you can't go around telling people you love them.

Why not dad?

Well you just can't that's all. Besides you must not say something like that unless you really mean it.

But I do.

You do?

Yes dad, I really do.

That stumped him for a little sixty second minute. I guess he didn't know what to say, so he got mad. Told me that I was never to bless anybody or say things like that period. If he ever heard of me blessing anybody again he'd wallop me.

Down a crowded sidewalk, between songs and soft spoken words. The village a corner of Polyphemus's

Cave. I know that one by one all these young shipwrecked souls will be plucked out by an enormous hand and swallowed down the enormous belly of industry and profit. Mammon is a whale and that guy there at city hall the surviving vestigium of a piscine primiform, opening his great big mouth to swallow little Jonah for anti-mammonistic activities.

P.P. (Paisan Pontius). Of what do you accuse them?

Big mouth from city hall. They are proclaiming a new law.

That's bad. What else?

A new society, and a new morality. They will not bow to Caesar.

Oh, that's really bad!

They are a vicious sect, a threat to this system and country which stands under God.

Under God's firmamented ass, this country God's shithouse. Satan's pride and joy. A little prayer; dear God, I'll do as you say and forgive those S.O.B.'s on one condition, that you give them hell. I want to see them squirming in boiling oil when I come up there to my reward. Heck, I'm only human. Faith in God's justice is the only thing that keeps me from murdering a lot of bastards.

"Aris me boy, would you say that there is something to the theory that religion keeps the bastard on top and the suckers at the bottom."

"Ass and religion Steve old boy! I figure religion by itself couldn't do it."

"Shouldn't we do something about it?"

"I have been doing something about ass for twenty years."

"You are a very honourable bastard."

One thing about Aris, he knows the score. A great man really, a man amongst men. Nay! A leader of *men and me*, little tricycle of Jesus. The way I see it, this life is a game played in reverse, you know what the score is so you just got to play the cards to match it. Aris

instead doesn't give a damn about playing the rules or changing them. But I have to mope all the time because I don't like the deal.

Aristides suddenly all excited, pulling Stephen by a sleeve, and mumbling under his breath. They step over a row of flower boxes squaring the sidewalk cafe and approach a couple of girls sitting at a metal table with an umbrella growing out of it.

"Hello Tricia." Big hello with a big smile. Aris can say almost anything with that one word. Patricia looked up at him and said another great big modulated-elongated hello which meant I got your message Aris, I'm wet already. Aris bounced around the table like his ass was pulling him to the empty metal chair. By the time he was sitting between the two girls the bounces went through his body like a kitten stuck inside a pillow case.

"Tricia darling, that's Steve there! Steve Canada E.S.Q."

"Hello Steve, meet Dorothy Leigh. Sit down won't you."

Stephen looked at the machined assprint on the metal and fitted himself on it with an inaudible grunt.

"Stephen Canada?" said Tricia intrigued, while Dorothy looked on with shared interest.

"Yes, Canada, just like in Canada."

"Well isn't that interesting."

"Oh it's fascinating," said Aris.

Dorothy produced a pack of cigarettes out of her purse and Steve promptly got his lighter out and held it in front of her face eager to be of service, and then she took all the time in the world to get a cigarette out for herself and offer one to everybody else, and by the time she was ready to light it the bloody lighter wouldn't work. So everybody laughed except Stephen of course, and Dorothy smartly flicked a flame out of her own lighter and lit up Stephen's cigarette.

"I haven't seen you in years Patricia."

"It's more like a few months."

"It seems like years to me honest!"

"What do you do Stephen?" Dorothy asked him.

"Dorothy is from out of town. I'm showing her the limelights of the big city," said Patricia.

"How nice," Aristides suddenly started showing interest in Dorothy.

"Do you paint? Or write?" resumed Dorothy.

"Yeah, yeah! I paint, I write. Climb walls. Mostly climb walls."

"Steve is a true artist Dorothy. But very modest."

She smiled. "Seriously though, what do you do?"

"Nothing."

"You must do something."

"Well you might say I do research work."

"That's interesting. On what subject?"

"Head and tail."

"Eech-eeh, you are funny."

"Ah aaah. Where do you come from?"

"Oshawa, well not Oshawa proper, near Oshawa."

"Aaah ah. You are pretty funny yourself."

Aris got as close to Patricia as the chairs would allow and whispered something in her ear.

"Oh Aris!"

"Why not?"

A moment of uneasy silence.

"Would you like us to go to my apartment for a drink?" she asked Stephen and Dorothy.

Sure said Stephen, O.K. said Dorothy and the four of them got up instantly.

Four of us riding in a Plymouth way up to Eglinton for a drink. I didn't believe it, though there had been times when I went in for a cup of coffee or a drink and got exactly that. Some girls are not honest at all. I mean if some girl asks me in for a cup of coffee I have the right to expect a piece of tail no? Well anyway, off we went. Patricia driving and Dorothy and I in the back holding on to each other rather conventionally.

Patricia's apartment, like most girls' apartments, neat

and doll-like, like some dentist's waiting-room. We did musical chairs for a while which I find a very depressing activity, no sooner would I get in an advantageous position or stage, than up would pop Dorothy to get some more pretzels or refill the highball glass for me, or as I get her moaning a little and she lets herself go, then right behind the plastic ivy they make a sudden movement and she perks up right away and pulls my hand out of her skirt. Then by the time I was drunk enough that I didn't really care she turned on like a wolf. In no time at all I was lying in bed beside Aris, curtains drawn, and the two of them were bending over us with great smiles and giggles pulling our pants down. With a little help of course. I was so drunk by then that the greatest sensation, sexual or not, was from an occasional contact with Aris's red, hairy arse. I mean it was fun really, legs and arms all over the darn place in the dark but I was physically defused, besides she had a little defect, she whispered shyly in my ear. Nothing alarming, only it's a little twisted inside, crooked you might say. Don't you worry Dorothy I'll straighten it out for you. It's because the first time I had a bad job done to me. Yeah, it can happen, I'll fix it! Hey let go of Tricia. Who is that? Canada? Oooo! Let go of me! Let me go. Aah-aah. Sshsh, don't yell. I'm going home. Don't go Dorothy, you stop that. It was Aris. A door opened and the musical silhouette of Dorothy was framed scurrying away. Sobs and bare feet on the green carpet in the living-room and the three of us pausing for a minute to consider a problem.

Patricia jumped out of bed and tiptoed away.

"You stupid arse."

"Shut up Aris, I've had a hard time."

"I'll never take you to bed again."

Patricia hurried back, gathered a bundle of clothes, and then rushed out again slamming the door shut.

Two of us lying naked in the dark. Get up Aris. Why? I don't want you lying here beside me, I don't feel

decent. Then you get up, get me a drink and a cigarette. I can't go out there. Then just shut up, O.K.? We can't just lie here. Oh for crying out loud. Hey Aris. What? You've got coarse hair on your bum, very coarse. Oh shit. You aren't sexy at all as a matter of fact, touching your arse makes me shiver. Brr, like that! Of course I don't have any homosexual tendencies at all, so that may account for me not liking your arse. It's quite all right Steve. I mean I'm sorry I don't like it, I had never seen it before. I didn't know it was so hairy. Just a bit of a shock I guess. Will you shut up. I had to tell you. You told me. You're not sore? I'm going to kill you in an instant. But in half an instant Stephen was astride Aris and fists pumping away in the dark through a maze of arms and hands and then the light went on and they saw Patricia standing in the doorway pale as a sheet.

"Well!"

"Oh Patricia don't" Aris shoved Stephen off him and Stephen who was still stunned by her sudden appearance just went cataplunk onto the floor very uncatlike.

"Don't think whatever you are thinking Patricia darling." Aris hurried off the bed towards her while Stephen did some swearing on the oak floor.

"Don't you come close to me Aris!"

"What did I do?"

"Just get on your clothes and leave."

She slammed the door again. Stephen got up and limped around the bed holding one knee. Aris's angry face followed him.

"Don't look at me. I didn't do anything either."

"I don't know why I put up with you."

"Heh, no more violence Aris, the lady said we should get dressed and leave." They stood facing each other, naked and glaring. "I'll tell you one thing though," said Stephen looking up and down at Aris. "You may not be sexy-looking with three legs and all but you certainly are not effeminate either."

"Eeeh-eee-eh'."

"Atta boy Aris. Don't take it so hard. Better things ahead I assure you."

Better things ahead for sure, hidden somewhere by a super-duper Easter bunny. Some like green eggs in green grass, you know you've found one when you have squashed it with your foot. Like this life. It really must be a wonderful thing I figure, if only I weren't so bloody close to it. If I were dead in fact, but then I might not be able to enjoy being dead. Dear Lord and bunny, far be it from me to criticize your craftwork, but did you ever realize things got a bit mixed up down here? Like we get an awful lot of snow and ice in the winter when it's already as cold as hell and not a bit in the summer. Plain honest to goodness fun-flicking, cunt-licking, buttocks-slapping sex is out (obscene) and twisted dyspeptic morose squimsick unlibidinal pornography on stage is very highbrow stuff, and in. Negroes have better bladder systems because of riding in the back of the bus and now they want to ride in the front. Also they make life very miserable for white porters who, through no fault of their own just happened to be born white porters. Jews are extremely anti-antisemitic people. The good guys beat the bejeebers out of the bad guys (which doesn't seem coherent) and the bad guys every chance they get they beat (with four by fours even) the good guys, which doesn't seem to make much sense. Sometimes good guys mush up good guys and only rarely can the good guys sit back and enjoy a good humdinger between bad guys.

Quebec, which quite frankly, is a pain in the arse for the rest of Canada wants to separate, but the government insists that Canada wouldn't be the same without a pain in the arse, and perhaps never even make it to that glorious destiny they talk about. So we must not, at any cost, let that pain in the arse sail away with a fart. P.S.: As one Indian to another; a world upside down isn't so bad except when you're in the shit house. Signing off with love your plentyimpotentiary, Sir Stephen Nothing-

hereshire.

Out in a quiet street in the soft night, Aris's head pouring out a song about a summer night and sex in the dark and a relentless mosquito. Stephen doing the mosquito part with zzz's and zoom zooms. Living a serious business really. Though I know of people content with sex and comfort. Sensible bastards. That's what Myra would have had me do. Adjust to cultural patterns my dear Steve, oh it is nice to have sensitivity individuality and spirit but only if it is channeled through accepted forms of expression. Why don't you paint, or write? But you know damned well I couldn't do that Myra. I'm an artist. AN ARTIST!

Don't use foul language please, it may be colourful down on Elizabeth street, not here. Anyway that is exactly why I suggested that you find some form of expressing yourself.

I can express myself better by pulling my pants down and catching a little breeze on my arse.

I'm not going to discuss it with you if you insist on irritating me.

All right I'll try it your way. Darling I need some understanding.

I'm trying very hard.

Don't cry.

I do want to help you, I wish you believed me.

I believe you, here blow your nose, it gets red and drippy when you cry.

Haaa-hu hah-hu haa-hu.

Stop now. You make me nervous.

You have to make disparaging remarks about my person every time you get a chance.

It's not true.

Yes it is. You never said anything like that before we were married.

It didn't seem proper.

You're lying. You were afraid to lose me. You just wanted me for my money.

That too! And that.

Hahu haa-h hahuhahu!

Oh hell!

I was blind. I was blind.

Oh shit!

I thought you loved me.

Oh Keerist! That's what you wanted to believe.

Anyway I never got around to telling her that I wanted to be an artist of life. The way I figure it, painting, writing and composing or what have you, are false arts. Seducing traps for those slightly above sex and comfort, a deviation from the real art, which is life. The masterpiece of that great bunny up there is none other than me. At least if I express what I'm supposed to express. A Geppetto-Pinocchio kind of relationship and this here is boobieland no doubt. I must get out of it. Christ I got to get out of it. Wouldn't somebody please help?

"We are lost souls Aris."

"Amen!"

"You don't believe me do you?"

"Well I do, we might get a cab though."

An evil spirit suddenly took possession of Stephen's legs. Aris watching helplessly while Stephen is jolted up in the air legs kicking and mouth screaming, up and down on an invisible bronco ride and Aris after him arms outstretched to grab ahold of him but the legs suddenly kicked up a burst of speed and screaming Stephen was zoomed down Duplex Avenue and out of sight in a split second.

TWO

"Get up Myra. Get up. Get up!"

Stephen pulling Myra's foot out from under the covers. Myra turned the bedlight on and struggled with her free foot.

"Let go. Stephen let go!"

"Get up! Oh please get up. I must talk to you. It's very important. It's imperative."

"Oh for heaven's sake. What can we talk about."

Stephen releasing the foot, pointing a finger at the ceiling and rotating his eyes, "Geppetto."

"What? You are drunk." Myra sitting up in bed and brushing a strand of hair off her pale face. Her eyes expanded, "Why you are soaking wet. What have you been up to?"

"I had a little race."

"The police after you?"

"Gabriel and his heavenly Firestone Cops." Stephen hurried out of the bedroom and came back a minute later with a tall drink. "I only drink this to restore my energies. Don't look at me like that. I'm telling the truth, I'm not one of your libido-anemic friends who need to hot-rod their Ids before they can even think of cunt."

"Good gracious no. You have a filthy mind as it is."

"Now don't get saucy with me. You know perfectly well what I mean."

"I hope you didn't wake me up for a psychological discussion."

"I need a thousand dollars Myra. I just need them badly."

Myra's face just about blew off. Stephen rolled his

anger into a ball of spit and swallowed it.

"Well maybe six hundred."

He waited till she had blown the horn once more, watched her holding her belly and wiping her eyes and thought that murdering her would not be an expression of his higher sentiments at all. Aris was right, pity really, but one must be principled. Kill someone nice Stephen, must not yield to your lower instincts. Killing those bastards wouldn't help, nosir! But where the hell do you find someone nice enough to kill. Someone I would have to love so much.

"I wish I could love you Myra."

"That's very high brand psychology Steve, but you don't expect me to fall for it?"

"Please Myra, five hundred, all at once, not ten at a time. Have you no heart? What's five hundred dollars to you?"

"And what would five hundred dollars do for you?"

"Buy me a cave!"

"A what?"

"A cave. You know. A hole in a mountain where I could retire from the world. I want to go away Myra. But really away. There must be a cave somewhere where I could go and spend the rest of this warranty without ever meeting another human being."

"Well that's a new approach. You can buy a hole in a mountain for five hundred dollars?"

"Don't try to be funny. I just need the money for a ticket to southern Italy or Spain."

"Perhaps the Riviera?"

"You don't think I would go and freeze my arse off somewhere in the Precambrian shield?"

"I'm just trying to visualize it. Wouldn't a hut in Temagami be more appropriate for you? After all you have Indian blood. You would feel quite unnatural in the Mediterranean."

But I keep seeing myself, beard and sandals, a lonely figure up a rocky path and thoughts like motionless

lizards soaking up the sun, hardly disturbed by the passing shadows of memories and knowledge. A simple bowl and a bed of corn husks and meditation. Give God a chance to talk to me for a change. Here God I'll say no more, my heart is a trumpet, blow will you. I'll make no more noises I promise, blow no more myself, I'm no trumpeteer I'm a bloody trumpet trying to blow into God. Go to church, ta-taaa-tata-taaaata! Blowing my fucking horn all the time. Here you give it a blow for Pete's sake. Everybody trying to get a tune out of himself. Aris thinks he is an artist. Hey Steve look here, how do you like this one? Oh that's just beautiful Aris. It's a masterpiece. But what is Aris? He is an artist for heaven's sake. Make a fart and right away your arse thinks he's got talent. But I'll sit up there under a lion's sun and meditate, oh yeah! On a baking rock beside a cool cactus and let my ego gather at my feet like morning fog down in the valley and my soul rise like a shimmering peak out of the long creeping shadows.

"Three hundred?"

"Why don't you get a job?"

"I forgive you Myra. I'm going to become a saint."

"Ah-aaaa-ah!"

Stephen with a face of fury taking a few steps towards her, sucking air through his teeth, hands stretched towards her and shaking terribly, hesitating and then coming down limply to his side. Myra starting to laugh again, nervously this time.

"Oooh-oooooh-ohoh!" Like that. Laugh all you want, I'm not going to touch you with a ten foot pole. Not even sock you in the mouth. Nosir. The days I would pray for a Doctor Strangelove and that brand of mercy annihilation are beyond me. I'd dream they'd start dropping the blasted bombs and poof! No more suffering. I was the guy inside every God-fearing being who was shouting yeah-yeah-yah! During the Cuban crisis. Let them have it! Sockittome Baby Jesus.

Stephen with a penitent look. "I forgive you Myra."

Lifting up his inspired face to the ceiling, and bringing up a huge balloon in the palm of his hands. "Forgive her Lord, pray forgive her for she does not know what she is."

"Hooo, hoooo hoo!" Myra in terrible pain, all twisted up and kicking her legs in a tantrum.

And I was working for the C.P.R. in Montreal one summer, just extra help for the busy season. I never did really work much but anyway all these guys hired for the summer would gather at the yards every day and just wait all day, inside this building when it rained or out on the tracks when it was sunny. And one day this crazy, fire-tongued ass-slugging Jehovah's Witness came around and told me to repent right away because I didn't have a minute to spare, and I was inclined to agree in principle at least but I didn't want to give him any satisfaction, I mean I'd have probably done him a great harm if I had kneeled right down in front of everybody, because there is no way of telling how much credit and glory he would derive from it through his twisted mind. So I told him to fuck off. But he was a determined bugger that guy, he just lashed me with all the damnation he had in his heart to try and save me. Of course all the boys started laughing, and I told him that his God was all twisted and full of shit if he had to send around arse holes like him to invite quarter breed jerks like me to his half-witted gathering. And he staggered back like the earth had suddenly split before his feet to a view of hell, and he lifted a Gantry hand above his head and poured out a voice from the top of the mountain, "Aaaaaaa! The vengeance of God is upon you. He will surely strike you down with lightning and fire!"

Oh you son of a shit. Tell him to go ahead and do just that. Right here and now on C.P.R. property, I dare him to. Go ahead blabbermouth, tell him up there to strike me down with a cheap bolt of lightning or to go fuck himself. Of course I was talking to my God while pretending otherwise. I just wouldn't have had the guts

otherwise, not because I couldn't take the punishment, my God no, that was the whole idea. I'd go to any length just to get a sign from him, any sign at all. I would have been the happiest guy who's ever been struck by lightning. But really I could never talk like that face to face with the big G. up there. So as I said, I was feeling pretty miserable about my own God having to be so sweet and principled and stick to the rules and all that, that I just couldn't resist the occasion to try to make him budge. That's it Lord! Lose your temper. For Christ's sake Lord can't you ever lose your temper and do something? All right no miracles, no pleasant signs, but at least a whiff, a little wrath, just slip one bolt down here while nobody is looking. Even if they do, they won't believe it was you, accident, or maybe coincidence. Maybe you don't want to do it so that you won't hurt this poor fucker here. I know it'll go to his head.

Common sucker, tell your blasted God up there to melt the dirt I'm standing on and let the bowels of the earth swallow me down to Lucy's Joint.

But no, oh no! The little guy sort of disappeared out of the building and everybody went back to play cribbage. It was just all in a day's laugh. I had really gotten all excited, believe you me I half expected to be cremated right there, at least I thought there was a chance, and I was searing with hope, the best chance in my life to find out that God is really OK. That he is in full control of things, and that therefore the bastards will fry in grease and the good guys will be like bloody princes. I mean life is too much otherwise. There must be justice somewhere. Only there is a little doubt too. What if this fucking place is without a pilot, and here we are and we are not going anywhere when this little trip around Galileo's corner is over. What then? Poor sucker me. Shouldn't I have killed a few bastards? Yeah man! Yah! All right big G. I tell you what, either you give me a sign that everything is going according to plans, or I

just have to take matters in my own hands. I mean I'm sorry to do this to you, if you can't talk to me, bound by something or other, but I can't go on like this. Terrifying what all can go through your mind in a few adrenalin spiced minutes. I pictured myself carbonized, on the floor, soul going down to the furnace downstairs, God up there surreptitiously slipping a little cracker away. I was almost laughing I was so happy. But nothing damn it. I have tried again since, I have thought the most dastardly thoughts, sworn like a Turk, everything, but I guess maybe he just knows that right down deep inside I'm just a shrivelled up pip of love. So that won't work. I really could play his game if I could just be sure that I wasn't playing a solitaire. But he might talk to me in a cave though. I just have to have a cave.

"You won't change your mind then."

"About what?"

"About a little bit of money."

"Oh you're not serious are you?"

"Of course I'm serious, I have to get to southern Italy. I have to live thirty years in a cave so that I may speak to God."

"Eeeeeeeheehet-eeeeheeee-oo-aaah! That's enough please Stephen, you are giving me a belly ache."

"I'll picket in front of the building again."

"Go ahead. I'll cut off the allowance."

"Allowance big deal. You are just getting an insane kick watching me lose every bit of pride, you are trying to emasculate me to revenge yourself for your own hypocrisy. Did you really think I love you ah? My binary balls you did. You just fooled yourself, that's what you did, and now you can't stand yourself so you take it out on me."

"You said you loved me! You said it."

"I only told you what you wanted to hear, you were holding me by the stomach you were, stupid arse. You are just like everybody else, if you can't enjoy being rich you will enjoy not being poor, keep some poor buggers

starving to remind yourself how good it is to be living in the country of ass and freedom and how important it is to clobber them on the head once in a while just so that they won't get any ideas. Well you aren't going to clobber me anymore, because I'm not going to give you any excuses to do it legally and morally, I'm going to starve damn it. Starve to death but not moan one complaint. I'm going to go on a hunger strike that's what I'm going to do. So there."

"Oh God. What next?"

Just saying that made him hungry as hell. He tiptoed out of her bedroom, through the dark in the living-room and brought some cheese and beer to the table in the kitchen. Myra came to see after a few minutes.

August Twelfth, munching a salami sandwich in front of the blinking T.V. set. Maybe it's August thirteenth, or November the thirty-fourth. Why the hell do I have to know what day it is? As I sit here in relative peaceful mood, beer and salami, a nice little guy is brought in front of me handcuffed and everything and shot through the head. Bang! Blasted a corner of his brain over towards the Azalea plant, little bits of grey matter and blood still titillating with life and blood on my salami and a little chunk of bone drilled a hole right through the middle of the thick beer head and slowly sank to the bottom of the glass. Hey you guys, watch out will you! I mean can't a guy drink a beer in his own living-room and not get mucked up with guck like that? The media miracle is not complete, that guy there should have been watching me sitting in slippers, munching salami and sipping beer while he was getting shot through the head. Here I light a filter-tipped cigarette, just you watch me sucker. WATCH MEEEE! Beam this Galloping Gourmet program to Biafra for Chrissake. Let them watch, those yam bellies, let *them* watch us. I can watch three thousand starve every day and not build up enough guilt-energy to send out a ripple of pain to search and stir a cosmic conscience, but let three thousand of them

watch me every day, and those burnt and defoliated watch our dear leaders, our pillars, our distinguished citizens, plain money bags and various up-on-the-go pricks and enough hate and disgust might be produced to vibrate a sense of doubt through the great foundations of divine justice. I'm for punishment and reward *NOW!* To hell with this sin now pay later plan. Sockit to me baby, I'm a lockless Samson. Electronic pillars of the Philistines holding the structures of the government of Libido, by libido, for libido. Assmocracies and cunt-centered culture of Napalm Christianity. Yippie! Yeppie! Hurray! The Yippies want that people should be free to fuck all the time, anywhere, whomever they wish. Aye! Aye! Maybe *that* would bring Gomorrah down. Would *that* upset big G.?

Stephen getting up standing rigidly in front of the T.V. set for a minute with the limp piece of sandwich hanging from his fingers, then he raises it to the ceiling, lifts a leg way up in the air, Gibson style, and heaves the sandwich towards the T.V., missing it however and sandwich flattening itself on the wall behind it.

Myra looking first surprised then irritated.

"What did you do that for?"

"Didn't you see IT?"

"See what?"

"That guy there! Getting shot through the head."

"I didn't watch."

"Why the hell didn't you?"

"Why should I?"

"What an asinine question. A guy gets shot through the head and you don't even know why you should watch. Of course you should watch, you stupid bitch. Watch, watch! Oh hell I'm getting out of here."

Myra following with narrowed eyes and a little twist of preterition on her thin lips. God will pass me by most likely, if He is a Calvinist. But Life won't. No damn, something's got to be done down here, the sooner the better. Find a little temple, not too big and well

constructed for posterity and crush it down. My size. Heck. They are pouring cement down in hell, widening the streets, must build a highway all the way down there, for me little tricycle. And Louise wouldn't want me to sin and do it in the front, sin is in the darndest places really. I'll send her a large jar of vaseline for Christmas. A nice girl really, a bit confused about God. Confusing times. Myra got up to pick up the rest of the sandwich and dropped it in the wastepaper basket. Reading a book to satisfy her latent peeping-Tom complex. "Bye, bye now, I'm going down town to look over a temple. I might not be back."

Steve with a trace of palsy in his face waiting for her reaction.

"I said I might not be back again."

Myra turned, mouth slightly open and eyes half shut, like she was partly submerged in the sloth of her mind. And bobbing.

"Bye bye."

Three

Walking down St. Clair Avenue. The heart a guillotine, going: Myra, wham! Myra, wham! At each step. Hesitating in front of this elegant funeral parlor to see any signs of activity inside and maybe a little crowd gathering, and black limousines pulling up front with flags and a guy in a box with sewn jaws and varnished shoes. I have watched many processions, parked my feet at a distance and bowed my head, and once or twice I went in and sat in the cool chapel because I have a fascination for brass handles. I could just sit and stare at those things on the side of the casket all day. That's what I want to have when I go. Huge brass handles and a periscope if you don't mind, to watch out for the coming of the second Kingdom. Kind of slow on Sundays but I know in the house of God they are giving away little bits of Jesus dipped in wine. When I was a kid they told me that if I bit him he would bleed and I never laid a tooth on him. I was tempted I must admit, but I never had the guts. Maybe not because I didn't want to hurt Jesus, but because I would have died of shame with blood gushing out of my mouth and sitting amongst the very faithful. Maybe my ass. I know darn well it was so. And Jesus in the back of my mind getting all excited, yeah, yeah, bite me, for Pete's sake bite me Steve! Don't worry about them Goddamn you. Bite me! Hurt me! Let your heart out. But I didn't. I just couldn't be ashamed in front of my equals, in front of God yes, that's easy, but not them. Jesus cried, in the back of my mind that is. I heard him going, huh-hooooo-huh hoooh. He wouldn't stop for days. So I went back next Sunday and I was determined, oh boy. Grinding my teeth and clenching

my fists all the way to the altar and when the priest slipped the thin sacrament in my mouth I closed my eyes and just went WHHAAAAMM! Took a finger off him, and I thought it was Jesus wiggling in my mouth and would have surely passed if he hadn't kept hitting me and yelling to give him back the finger. So I stopped practising, I mean I'm not going to church anymore and not receiving my sacraments, which for a devout Catholic is pretty bad, but I stand outside once in a while, and listen to the muffled singing feeling outcast and dramatic. I like the feeling of being an outcast, out of God's grace, expiating. I like to think of myself as the Wandering Christian. Not all the time of course, part time, on Sundays for example. I don't really know what I'm trying to get at. Maybe to become a Sint, which is the opposite of Saint, one who is recognized as having achieved Sin. Not so easy as it seems, to really know sin. Sint Stephen. Heck! Might as well try it this way. I wanna get there as much as anybody else. Leave me be, I'll go my way. Honestly. I'm on my way Jesus.

Sint Stephen dancing in the sun, empty sidewalks and a few strangers standing in the corner waiting for a Sunday bus. Cigar store closed, shiny cars up to Mount Pleasant, driving slowly in their Sunday canoes. The doors of sin are shut in the Presbyterian city. Toronto the Good and down on Jarvis Street the whores take a day off. Screwing all the time must be hard, I have seen them with tired faces and tired feet looking down at mens' legs and I told one that she would see Jesus because her sin was not hers but mine. And she said, sure Mac, why do you think I'm here getting paid? I don't do it for nothing. And I placed my blessing upon her arse, a papal hand lifted over her, Oh Holy Father, bless this nourishment that I'm about to take. . . . Hey cut the religion will you. It gives me the creeps. Come do your trick and get out of here! Would you mind covering yourself up while I finish my prayer, for my Father's sake. Then she wanted another five bucks

because I had brought my father in. But I didn't have another five bucks and she was satisfied with two. Which I thought was a pretty good bargain and asked her if she wouldn't do it again for the same rate but she said she wouldn't do it again for a million dollars.

Turned north in the shade of a great big building and away from the stares of those people waiting for transportation. A mad hatter there doing a crazy dance on St. Clair. Kicking legs up in the air and going wheeee! Never seen the likes of it in this fair and smug city, and on Sunday too, the day set aside for reason of insanity. Crates of infinity these Presbyterian Saxons, shipping emptiness from the cradle to the grave. Empty vessels. And a half breed doing a crazy step up Yonge, crossing the street with kangaroo hops and sitting on the steps of a stone church. Music inside, from pipes, and songs from sound boxes, standing neatly in rows and when they finally come out through their halos, stepping to the side not to tramp on this queer fellow squatted in the sun, possessed look on his face and the hand stretching out cupped for alms, bumping the guys on their calves, and stroking the girls around their knees. Chanting gurturally.

"Bless your souls! Give alms! Limousine! Help the almsman! You sir, may the breeze of charity in your heart refresh your beloved departed. Thank you sir!" Folding and tucking a dollar quickly in his pant pocket. "Give charity! Aaahh Alms! Sweet girl! God bless your charitable soul."

A man of a certain elegance and dignity paused to mutter, "Shame on you. Don't you feel ashamed?"

"Not yet, I swear it to God. But I'm trying sir. I'm trying very hard."

"They ought to take you to jail. That's what they ought to do."

"And flog me, dear sir! And maybe nail me to two by fours."

And another one bent down to place a quarter in the empty palm. Giggles among the crowd down on the

sidewalk and now the main part of the congregation pouring out after the final song.

"Bless your putrefied dead, give alms! Give charity to the alms man."

"You poor man!"

A skinny old lady, with a toothless mouth and limp lips fluttering like flaps at every word. "Have you no job?"

"No ma'am."

She opened a little coin wallet with her trembling little hands and placed two dimes, one at a time in his hands.

"Oh that's enough ma'am," he said after the first one.

"Nonsense, I have got another one here somewhere."

"One is enough my sweet lady. From the heart. It hurts."

"Oh here it is."

"Thank you ma'am, I bless you!"

"Oh that's nothing."

An assistant moving in through the crowd, looking down at Stephen then to the little lady and not a squirt of joy passing through the left auricle. Nor the right one for that matter.

"Give alms! Bless your soul kind gentleman."

"I advise you to get up and move away from here."

"Gee thanks for the advice. I like it here, surrounded by kind people."

"Get going, or I'll phone the police."

"Why the poor young man, he is not doing any harm."

"Please lady, you go too."

"Well!"

"It's all right ma'am. You'd better do as he says. I can take care of myself."

"I will not."

"Then I'll go."

"You sit there young man, sit there as you please. Let's see if this man has the gall to have you moved."

"It's all right I don't mind going, I don't want to upset this kind gentleman."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. It is better."

Sint Stephen and the little lady with the squeaky voice parading through the crowd under the watchful eye of the kind gentleman, crowd splitting like the Red Sea before this Godly couple. Up in the clear sky above Mount Pleasant a lonely cloud sailed wispily across the sun. A chuckle from heaven. Cars moving out and high heels of Sunday walking up and down the sidewalk of Yonge. Stephen and the lady crossed the street, lady holding Stephen's arm.

"The people, oh the people and the things they do."

"Yes."

"Are you hungry?"

"No ma'am."

"It is almost lunch time."

"I know."

"Will you have a cup of tea with me. I live right . . . right there. It's a quiet little place although God knows how long it will be before they tear the whole street down to build those unsightly apartment houses."

"Progress ma'am. Progress."

"But do they have to build them right here? I have lived here most of my life. Why should I move now that I'm so old? Those terrible machines are getting closer every day. I can hear them all around me. Early in the morning they start. Clangety clang! One street after another."

"It's pretty terrible all right."

"I don't know what got into people since the war."

"I have got to go ma'am."

"Nonsense, you must have time for a cup of tea. It isn't every day I can entertain a nice young man like you."

Giggles.

"Even if I do do it in a rather forward manner," she

added.

"All right, you are right. And to tell you the truth it isn't every day I can have tea with a sweet little old lady like you. . . ."

Steve pale as a ghost, stops dead, a thought of a gory murder and him with a hammer dripping blood.

I suggest you kill a little old lady with a hammer Steve.

Steve screaming. Scared the living daylights out of her. The little lady almost collapsed, knees buckled and her gaping toothless hole opened without a breath.

Stephen tore away from her arm and ran away towards Yonge Street again. The little lady watched him as her bony breast crinkled with pain. "The poor man," she said. "The poor young man."

FOUR

Mount Pleasant is a nice cemetery, a lot of shade, lawns, birds up on the trees and lovely walks, but this little cemetery here back of Yonge Street is the real restful place. You go through a broken gate, down an alley full of litter, broken glass, and rusty cans, and you walk into a weed patch, up to your waist, tombstones half buried, sinking tilted, chipped and stained. The Irish builders, brick layers and smiths rest here. Forgotten. I only found the place one day because I was drunk and I had to do something, and I went down this narrow and dark alley. I don't think anybody knows this place is here. But I have spent many a night here ever since. A beautiful place to be when you want to be out in the open, under the stars or what have you. Mostly I come here when I'm sick. Really sick. Like now. I come and sit on this here dead Irish face, lean on his block of granite and strike a conversation. He is a foul-mouthed guy I tell you. Swears like a Turk, but the talk is very informal most of the time so I don't think anybody would mind. Not anybody with an open mind. Anyway though he insults me continuously I know he is pretty lucky because I'm the only living thing in here in ages. His name is Patrick O'Tim and he was born a hundred years to the day before I was born, that's why I go and sit with him. That is, on him. Maybe it isn't fair to the others but one's own feelings don't ever seem to be fair to anyone else, so it is an accepted fact around here anyway that if I come I go directly through my own stamped down path and sit by him. He never did mention the fact that I stole the wrought iron cross from the top of his stone. A fine piece of work it was. I'm

sorry I sold it now. Only got me a quarter because the antique dealer was Jewish.

Steve went down the beaten narrow path, stopped at the end of it feeling the warmth of the stone borrowed from the sun. Looked around the perimeter of the cemetery and listened to distant sounds coming from the back yards and open windows of the houses around the cemetery. Wondered if some sick person wouldn't want to observe him through field glasses. When he was sitting his head was as tall as the stone and his eyes averaged the height of the dried seeds wobbling on their long stems.

"Well Patrick old boy, how are you feeling today?"

"You fucking bastard."

"And what's new?"

"Contact lenses on a cow's arse."

"Up your jingling skeleton! You want to talk or sulk?"

"Talk? Hear him now? Indeed do I want to talk. Heh if I just had a little flesh on my mind, I could talk some sense into your bloody skull."

"If you are in a lousy mood I'll leave. I didn't come here to trade insults across the fence."

"So what's bothering you?"

"Nothing is bothering me."

"Ugh I take it then that you have finally taken leave of your senses!"

"Maybe."

"Can you still feel sorry for yourself then?"

"Shhh!"

"What?"

"Somebody is coming in."

"In here?"

"Shut up will you. A girl."

Whispering. "Do me a favour. Vacate the premises. I'll take my chance."

Silence. Girl coming through the gate. Following Stephen's path, letting her hair unfurl as she moves

slowly, ghostly among the tall weeds. Carrying something in her left hand and now shaking her hair behind her shoulders like a fine T.V. ad. Stephen cocking his head down, and peering through the blades.

"Is she coming this way?"

"Shut up Patrick!"

She lifts one arm in the air and slowly begins to rotate from it, kicking her shoes off, like she was hanging from a string. Very close now. Stephen having trouble to breathe without wheezing. She rips the bag she carried in her left hand and produces a full quart bottle of milk. Slowly she removes the sealer and drinks from it. Then she places the bottle on the top of a stone and begins waving her arms and slowly her whole body finds the motion until she moves like a silky weed growing into a fluid current. Stephen hypnotized now, eyes popping out and jaw like an open drawer, subconsciously ducking lower into the weeds when she turns his way. Her motions becoming more frantic, then the currents rip her off her feet and she glides between the stones in a mad vortex, eyes wild, arms and head throwing and as she comes very close and Stephen ducks very low a blade of grass penetrates his left nostril and sparks a blast from his lungs. Girl like a frozen weed. Looking towards Stephen and Stephen's head slowly emerging.

"I'm awfully sorry." Stephen sticking a finger in his nose. "I got a weed up my nose and I sneezed."

She ran back to pick up her milk bottle. She looked angry. She began searching for her shoes. Having a bit of trouble.

"Please don't go away. I won't bother you. I'm dead anyway."

She looked suspiciously at him. Then resumed looking for her shoes, parting the grass with her arms. Stephen walked to her and stooped down to help her.

"What colour are they?"

"Black."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to peep."

"Not your fault."

"I must say I enjoyed it though."

"You probably think I'm crazy." Stephen stopped pretending that he was looking for her shoes and looked at her with interest.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You are a beautiful girl. Are you a dancer?"

"No."

"You dance beautifully."

"How on earth am I going to find my shoes in here?"

Girl stooping and poking around, Stephen watching her with a queer smile, working a slender shiny black shoe deep in the turf with his toes and keeping his foot on it.

"My name's Steve. Steve Canada. I'm an expert at finding shoes in old Irish cemeteries. You need not worry."

"Steve . . . Canada did you say?"

"It gets almost everyone. A queer name it seems."

"Not at all. Why it's a lovely name."

"You mean it or are you just trying to be nice?"

"Of course, I guess I was just surprised. Why didn't anybody think of a name like that before?" She became suspicious suddenly again. "You are kidding me?"

"No." Raising his hand. "I swear it. A name to remind me of the Indian blood in my veins."

"Oh." She resumed searching. Stephen resumed smiling. Then she found a shoe. "Oh here is one. The other one must be here somewhere." She straightened up and looked at Stephen. "You're not looking."

"Oh yeah. I'm sorry."

Stephen looking around straining his eyes but not budging so that he can keep her shoe hidden under his foot, stones glittering the slanting rays and a scent of perfume mingling with the dried grass and bones.

"You are not looking," she cried annoyed.

Stephen immediately shaded his eyes with one hand and gawked intensely about. But this instead of appeas-

ing her made her suspicious, her gaze ran slowly down to his feet, then she saw it. She walked up to him and while he tried to strike an expression of genuine surprise she pulled her shoe from under him.

"Oh there it is!"

"You were standing on it."

"I told you I was good at finding shoes in old Irish cemeteries."

"Yeah!"

"You're not angry now are you?"

She laughed.

"That's a good girl."

"You looked so funny!" she said still laughing and putting her shoe on. "Why were you hiding it?"

"Because I like you."

She frowned.

"I really do. Boy I really like you! Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"Whoa! Stephen Canada, whoa. Not so fast please. Speed kills you know."

They started down the path slowly.

"Are you a model?"

"Uh huh. How did you guess?"

"You have certain movements that only a model has, nice."

"I was trying to get rid of them."

"Dancing?"

"Yes."

Stephen following her on the side of the path.

"Why?"

"To be myself."

"Aye. That's very difficult."

"Especially for a model."

"Me too, I'm sort of a model."

They stopped at the unhinged rusting iron gate and looked back inside forlornly.

She looked around for a place to leave her quart of milk.

"May I carry it for you?"

"No, there is no need. I can leave it here. I ripped the bag."

"I'll carry it, please."

"All right," she giggled. Stephen smiled gratefully.

"I'm sorry I was there. I interrupted you."

"It's all right. What were you doing there?"

"Feeling sorry for myself I guess."

Up Yonge Street again, Stephen walking slowly with a bottle of milk hanging nimbly from his fingers. Not talking for a while, strangers, like a couple of snails bumped in the dark. Antennae, fingers of the soul exploring the mystery of hope beyond the fringe of fear. Fear a shell hard on the inside and soft outside, no protection at all. It keeps you inside so that trouble can come to you. Prisoner of myself. The wandering Catholic. Must do something to tickle God's fancy or he won't budge. This nice girl here, having a bit of the same trouble, wanting to be herself and not knowing how. Losing the grip, perhaps objecting to the fact that she is letting herself be supported through being a model, lost identity. A case which I'm fortunate enough not to have to contend with. Or maybe that's my trouble? There is a great choice.

"I guess you don't like being a model?"

"Oh it's all right."

"Glamorous, that's what a girl likes."

"Yes."

"Where are you going now?"

"To a party."

"A party, at three in the afternoon? Sunday?"

"Yes, well it's not really a party. More like a glorified slave sale. This guy is coming in from London. A great photographer. He wants to look over us to see if anyone could inspire him to become God for a little while. A frustrated Svengali. You should see him operate."

"I'd love to."

She stopped to look him in the eyes. She looked tired,

Stephen didn't know whether to smile or to look sad, managed to look confused. That seemed to sadden her.

"You can come. Anybody can come, they like spectators."

"They, who?"

"This guy and Lady Russell, the divine hostess."

"Oh boy! I wouldn't miss it. By the way you haven't told me your name yet, do you mind?"

"Lynn Rennie."

"Hello Lynn."

"Hello Steve Canada."

Steve Canada and Lynn Rennie arm in arm, walking along closed shops, guyed signs, dead neon signs, and the sun hung up there. Incessant. Bleeding sun and thank God on the other side, under a sieve of stars not much going on. Cain and Abel alike, must sleep. Murder in the daytime, under the bleeding sun, and maybe not long from now a satellite sun illuminating the jungle for more killing. Olé. How many Jesuses killed down yonder? Shoot the bloody gorillas in the arse. Atta boy. In dem Bordell ist liebe. Boobieland. Yack yack-dung. Hello arse hole of heaven and plasticine Jesus. Stretch those bloody wounds. Boy I love Sundays in this great Presbyterian city, it's like the aftermath of coitus, the pullout blues. And a little tippy toey trip to the washroom, and stepping on a little dribble on the way back. I always step on a little dribble on the floor. Christ Lord make this trumpet day. Tattatattaaa and what have you. Give us the whole shabang. I have had it. Not a pip of faith left. Make the sun a supernova. Bang.

"I love you Lynn."

"Oh come on!"

"Like a sister."

"We are there."

"Where?"

"Up there."

Sliding up the gut in a cubicle of elevation, up in its inexorable time of gears and R.P.M.'s. Smiling looking at

the digit light up. 14-15-P. Doors sliding open like electrical jaws and out into a room of elegant depravity and phony merriment, sounds of laughter from the Boobieland express, and he with his quart of milk and his fair lady hesitating on the threshold of false eyelashes and powdered tits.

"Here we are Stevc."

"Yeah. Lots of girls!"

And a ghost all in white dropped from the soup of things and rushed to welcome them. An old whore with a long lean face stripped to starvation, blue streaks for eyebrows, mascara for eyelashes and a thin lipstick smear on her bloody lips.

"Lynn daaarling, I don't know what I would do without you."

Masculine resonant voice reminiscent of army barracks. Looking Stephen over with slow uninhibited pleasure. "Who is this darling man?"

"Stephen Canada, Lady Russell."

"How do you do."

"Where, oh where did you find him daaarling."

"In a cemetery."

"Wohh-wohh wohh! You are joking? No you aren't. Don't tell me they are carting them away! Hey listen boys and girls. This here delicious hunk of man is Stephen Canada. I want you to keep your hands and legs off him. He is mine."

Lady Russell with a double arm lock on Stephen leading him through the crowd to the bar, where he left his bottle of milk, and out into the terrace where they were alone.

"Well Stephen, you haven't said a word for a full minute. I'm anxious to hear your voice. Do you talk?"

"Yes ma'am. Two ways, inside and out. Inside most of the time."

"Oh no, no when you are with me, let your insides come out my boy, I have to hear it. Would you sit down with me. You aren't drinking. And what were you doing

in a cemetery? Don't call me *ma'am*, please don't call me that. It is sweet of you to think so, but I'm not like that at all."

"OK, yes, yes, no, OK. OK."

"Wohhh-wohh-wohh! You haven't kept track? Don't listen to all I say. My name is Sara. Just call me Sara. Are you comfortable there?"

"Very nice Sara."

"Do you think I'm very old?"

"Sixty?"

"Oh ho my dear boy, you have a delightful punch."

"Fifty-five?"

"Don't make it worse with kindness. I asked for it. Do you always give straight answers."

"I try."

Lynn appeared at the door, stood pale by a palmlike plant.

"What is it dear?"

"Steve, could I see you for a moment?"

"Oh dear, dear, you are not going to warn him?"

"Excuse me please."

Stephen and Lynn moving inside, out of sight of Lady Russell and into the sly stares of others. Lynn a bit upset, quivering a bit at the mouth, lower lip pinched between a string of beautiful teeth, and her eyes darting suspiciously.

"What is it Lynn?"

"I don't know how to say it."

"Come on."

"Let's get out of here. Please."

"Already? We just got here."

A glint of meanness now in her eyes of blue open fields and menthol cigarettes. "I'll warn you then. She is a shark Steve. She'll have you in bed with her in a half hour."

"Hohohohohohhhh!"

Lynn breaking away and the crowd silent and staring for a suspenseful minute, then a lone giggle like a pebble

bouncing on the floor followed by an avalanche of laughter. Steve retreating out to the terrace. A bit shook up. Gulping his drink down under the watchful naked eyes of Lady Russell.

"A sweet girl. Did she upset you?"

Stephen hesitating, being watched very intently by her small grey protruding eyes, a nervous smile stretching her slitty lips and gathering the loose folds of her mouth under her cheekbones. No eyelashes, no eyebrows, probably bald as a billiard ball.

"No, no she said something funny. She said you would lure me to bed within half an hour."

"Who-whoah, that's not so funny!"

"Hee-heeh! No? Oh come on!"

"I can try, can't I? I mean you couldn't blame me could you?"

"No I guess not. All right, start luring me."

"I must say you are not a hypocrite. I like you Steve, I would give anything to be able to lure you as you say, but I don't think I would be very successful. Unless. . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you let me undress in front of you."

"Go ahead!"

Lady Russell up on her feet, extending a hand towards Stephen. "Come then!"

"Where?"

"My studio."

Stephen getting up reluctantly, picking up the empty glass and making a move towards the living-room.

"No not that way."

"I need a drink. I think."

"Leave the glass here, I have a bar. I think there is some Mumm's left in the fridge."

Down the terrace, hand in hand, Lady leading and Sint Stephen dragging his feet a bit. Around the corner of the building, into another extension of the terrace, and through a sliding glass door inside a large studio. With bed, bar, and large emerald-coloured aquarium.

Lady Russell getting a bottle of Mumm's out of a panelled fridge, two glasses out of dragon-guarded bar.

"Will you have some caviar with it, or would you like a sandwich of some kind."

"A hamburger."

"Don't be silly."

"All right, caviar will do then."

"Here help yourself."

Stephen heaping the caviar on a melba toast and watching Lady Russell going around drawing one layer of golden curtains after another. Golden filtered light. Melba toast spooning out the caviar, and washing down the Russian with French baron bubbles. A little bit of the jingles in the knees and exotic butterflies somewhere in the stomach. This is crazy. I don't think I will believe it tomorrow. There are sharks and sharks. I think she is brainless. Stop those kneecaps from quivering. What the hell is she doing now? Taking off her shoes.

"You will stay for a half hour then?"

"Yeah. Yes. I will."

"Please do watch me though."

"God yes!"

Some striptease, might get Patrick's old carcass to collapse a little more. Blouse on the floor, pearl white skirt dropping to her crimped feet. Folds of corrugated belly and network branches of blue veins on the side of the knotty legs. Don't stare at me like that, what kind of a twisted kick, watching me watching her. Come on take off your bra, am anxious to see. Bra off. Small poplike dribbly mammal glands and pale shrivelled nipples hanging like an empty bladder bag. A stream of fish eggs and frothy champagne fighting down through the knots and the locked stomach. All right give it to me damn it. I asked for it. Panties down. A yoke of a belly slipping down held by the umbilical knot, and down there at the ripped bottom of a V a curly sneer and fuzz. Oh God! What a way to ruin good champagne. How long is it? And that gloating look in her face. Should I tell her she's

had a flat. A leak of time. What now? Moving towards the bed. Lying down and staring at the ceiling, throbbing neck, and everything gone flat and runny on top of her. Hand slowly gently placed at the tip of the V. Oh no! Eyes shutting, and a little stroking motion of her hand. A motion so slight and yet so powerful and irresistible, drawing stroke by stroke into its own motion, a more inexorable force and freeing from the bonds of time and infinity its own captive will. The magnificent force of a thousand sighs and tears ebbing through her body at every spent instant, entering and swelling, escaping and subsiding. The hand now persuading and vivifying the swaying thighs, throbbing womb, and the rising belly into a pulsating fluid agony. An ugly beautiful torment streaking through her sexless body like a seed in the sidereal night, towards that moment of luminous burning unity. Stephen with a mind to escape, and a hot fury driving down his chest and belly, his own body and will sucked into the motion of her body, breathing her very same breath, feeling the very same fluid agony rushing through his body. Approaching her, standing over her, starting to tear his shirt off. She doesn't see him, just goes on with her own driving twisting body. Ugly and beautiful. She is his own life, his own pain and despair. Greed and hope, God and Satan. She is the world. She is the coliseum and Taj Mahal, she is Chicago, a ghetto, Buchenwald and Mary. She is an ugly bitch! Ugly bitch! "Ugly bitch! Ugly bitch! Ugly bitch."

She didn't flinch, Stephen almost out of his mind furiously undressing himself, and kneeling on the bed he draws slowly his hand to her neck in a strangling hold, and digs his fingernails in her soft loose skin and she doesn't flinch. He releases his grip and gapes at her for a brief moment, then breaking into a wounded cry he takes her hand away and slowly, but with an intensity of desire never known to him, lies on her and lets her feverish hand take a hold of his prick and guide it into her whimpering body.

Five

She was standing beside him, stroking his head when he woke up.

He could only keep his eyes open until he remembered. Then he shut them again wincing.

"Have a good sleep. I must go now. I'll be back though."

"Where are you going?"

"I'll only be gone a little while."

"What about the party?"

"They have gone."

He watched her walk to the glass door with a little apprehension.

"I left the car keys on the bar, in case you want to go for a little drive. And a little something for you." She was gone before he could think of something to say.

He lay for a while trying to figure out what was happening to him. Trying to make some sense out of it all. What did she mean she'll be back? Was he going to be there? Did she know what he was going to do? Car, a little something?

He got up and walked to the bar, picked up the keys and fancy key holder. Ferrari. You are kidding. Wheee! Stephen opening the envelope, pinching out a thin bunch of crisp, virgin one hundred dollar bills. Counting them, lips moving quickly nervously. Swallowing some saliva past the knot in his throat.

Tiptoeing to the side of the bed where the pants lay on the floor, picked them up and slipped the bills in his back pocket. Quickly put on his clothes and picked up the car keys on his way out. At the door he stopped and took another look at the money.

Makes me wonder whether I would do it again. She thinks I would. She might know. The ugly bitch, what a dirty trick. Never seen the likes of it. It must have been hate. Get out of here now and forget all about it. Yeah, yeah! A cave in Spain, or Calabria. What do I want with a car? Leave the keys here. Goodbye Lady Russell, that is goodbye world. Shit. Shit, I must think, should not do anything rash for which I might have regrets later. A thousand dollars a throw? Must think of old age. Be prepared and not sorry. She must be loaded. I mean really loaded. Life is. My chance to get something out of it and the conscience making Christian noises, wails. What the hell! And she's not constipated like Myra. A good heart. Maybe even a good soul. For all I know. Maybe just a little spin in a red Ferrari. Go down to flash it in front of Aris's cave. Get a mortician to go out at night and dig out Patrick. I want the bones installed here, won't need to go there everytime I want to chat with him. Could remove the aquarium and hang him there, a toe bone if he can spare, to be polished and mounted on a chain for good luck and friendship. I can have class and style with somebody like Sara with an understanding heart and a few private banks. Maybe just a little spin so that she doesn't mind. A little bit more champagne. I can think better. If only she weren't so ugly. Outside that is. I must be honest. Inside she's just like everybody else. Tender.

Stephen retrieving the champagne bottle from the fridge, sticking a finger in a dragon's mouth, pouring a little in the aquarium and a little in his glass, tilting his head to a sophisticated angle in front of a Munch lithograph, then out on the terrace with wings in his feet and jet sound effects from Stephen's mouth. Flying over the city. Bombing a passerby on the sidewalk with what's left in the bottle. DIE! You rotten Christian. Sun going down. Flaming incessant. Bleeding life. Going down St. Clair Avenue, past Caledonia. Down a slit between two buildings. Going to hell. Where hell is,

where they say peace and freedom is defended. Wait for me! I want to kill a child too. But no push-button killing for me, just give me a few cans of the jelly if you can spare it, and I'll rub it on them with my own Christian fingers and stick a short fuse in their arse and light them up for you. What's it matter if it's inhuman? Oh come on. What's the difference? I can't get the same feeling from pushing a button. You wouldn't fly twenty thousand feet over a gorgeous fuck and push a button to give her an orgasm would you? You'd go down there and give it to her yourself no? I mean shit, a man must have relativity. That's what I need boy. I mean on the individual base, just to know what little old me is all about right? I mean I'm no nation, I'm not the free world, not even democracy for heaven's sake so if I blast somebody's guts all over the place I want to relate those guts to my own, not to democracy or the Coca Cola board of directors. Boy I need relativity real bad! And I think Lady Russell has just bought a thousand bucks worth of relativity up her old gut. I guess we all need it, I need it more than anybody else. Maybe not anybody yet. I must be born again. Meanwhile I think I'd better play it cool with old Sara lady and just sit in this tower like a captured fair maiden, maybe learn spinning to pass the hours till my lord and master should return and find solace from her worldly engagements in my fair and youthful limbs. Letting the empty bottle fall, watching it with excitement, eyes granulating mouth gaping, a bomb! A bomb. Weeeeeshhh-bang! Retreating quickly into the large upholstered living-room, vestiges of a party, in the butts and lip-smears cocktail glasses. Elevator doors, the way out and down. To floor level, maybe world level. I'm an artist, relating the world to me, not me to the world. Eeece! In my own eyes the universe! Even God! Sara, Myra, Lynn and Aris.

Stephen answering the phone. Squeaky voice.
"Stephen here."

"Is that you Steve?"

"Yes, and who are you?"

"Lynn."

"Ah, yes Lynn. My fairy godmother! I must advise you I'm already growing donkeys' ears and yes, my feet are hoofing up. Now cry fairy godmother, your child is turning into an ass."

"I told you! I was right then?"

"You were absolutely right. Twenty minutes, no more. I love her. Where are you?"

"Oh Steve!"

"I'm not ashamed, it's relativity! Besides everything we do, I mean just everything we do, we do it because of fear of death, now did you know that? It's absolutely incontestable, there is nothing in life, or I haven't found it yet, so going to bed with Sara makes sense. I'll sing it to you, Sara makes sense, yeah-yeah-yeah! Sara makes sense, yeah-yeah-yeah!"

"Stop it! What are you going to do now?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know."

"I'll wait for her, like an impatient ardent lover, then I'll give it to her, right in the caboose, and I'll make her see China. I'm full of love, she proved it to me. I wasn't attracted to her, you can believe that, but to whatever was inside her. Something about God I believe."

"She'll ruin you Steve. I know she will. I have seen her doing it before. She'll keep you for a while, give you a sports car, money and everything and then she'll cut you off, just when you need her instead of her needing you. She'll cut you off like nothing."

"Sounds exciting, just like life. And death. Thanks for warning me."

"You are quite welcome."

"What are you going to do? Aren't you going to try and save me?"

"What do you think I'm trying to do?"

"But you brought me here you hypocrite. You knew what was going to happen. How can you make yourself

believe now that you care?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry. Anyway I just phoned because a man was here asking all sorts of questions about you."

"Asking questions about me? What the hell for?"

"I don't know. He wanted to know if we had any kind of relationship."

"Did you kick him in the teeth?"

"I just told him the truth, that I had just met you this afternoon. I don't think he believed it though."

"None of his fucking business."

"Steve. . . ."

"Yeah, what?"

"Are you married?"

"Yes, why?"

"Not happily married I gather."

"So it didn't turn out."

"It's none of my business either but I thought that might explain it."

"Oh hell, I must be stupid on top of everything else. What the hell are you getting at?"

"Well I thought most likely he was a private investigator. I know one, he told me the routine work they do in divorce cases. That's why I thought I'd better phone you."

"Oh God, don't tell me that now."

"I may easily be wrong."

"More likely you are right. The stupid bitch."

"What was that?"

"Muttering."

"What?"

"Muttering to myself."

"I'm sorry Steve."

"I think I should try suicide. At least consider it."

"Please don't."

"No probably not, I don't think much of it, although it is a rather extravagant gesture in both the scientific and religious points of view, but chances are that it

would turn out into the greatest letdown, I mean I could take a load of sleeping pills and fall asleep, just fall asleep, unconscious, and nothing Lynn, NOTHING YOU HEAR ME! Just like the fucking sucker I have been all my life, slip away into a blank. HELL! HELL! NO. NONO! I tell you I won't have it."

Stephen a Wagnerian figure walking stiffly to the middle of the room, phone hanging from his fist and clanging on the floor, arms outstretched and head transfixed, pouring out a yell, an infernal beast clawing his heart. "Hell, I'll kill him first, me! With my own hands, I'll kill him. Plain mortal me I'll strangle him, break his angelic wings right here and now." Stephen yelling away, a madman searching with his sanguine eyes for his enemy on the ceiling somewhere, invisible and elusive, and an excited voice coming up through the curls of the wire, out of his outstretched arms and fist, calling Steve, Steve what happened? What's wrong?

Arms coming down now, and head dropping, voice still calling his name, placing the receiver back to his head.

"Yes."

"What happened, I heard a terrible noise."

"The phone fell."

"Are you all right?"

"I'm just fine."

"Do you want me to come up?"

"No I'll be all right."

"Are you sure? You won't do anything silly? Please let me know if I can help."

"Thank you. Bye bye."

I couldn't think of anything silly to do. I mean nothing seems silly to me anymore. Nothing seems stupid or smart or tragic or beautiful, not now, maybe later it will seem so. Myra sending the hounds after me huh? Is that silly, smart or beautiful? I don't know. So she wants out. Imagine that. She came into our flop house that day to look at the paintings as I came out of the broom

closet and she looked rich. Boy she looked rich and beautiful in that stinking slum.

"Are you Donilo?"

"No ma'am, I'm Steve."

"Oh, I see. Is Donilo, the painter, here?"

"No but maybe I can help you."

"I came to look at his painting, I thought I might want to buy one."

And I spread my arms in the narrow hallway indicating the stupid canvasses hung all over the place, up the rickety stairs and everywhere and I said, "Here they are. All his work. Very penetrating stuff." And she penetrated them with her classic eye up and down the hallway and I tried to penetrate her with my own can-fed soul.

"This one here, what does it represent?"

"It's called *Economical Universe*, you can see from the efficient avidity of these lines and abundance of empty space expressing the idea that God created the universe in a rather parsimonious way. This is a very large painting by the way."

"Yes it is, that's why I'm considering it, I have a rather large empty wall."

"Eeee-eeh-yes eee-eeh, well down here, in this corner, the culminating exposition of this theory with the apparition of Adam and Eve as an ultimate proof of God's avarice. Made out of dust or mud, I'm not sure which, and anyway, so conceived that once activated these creatures will be desirous to fulfill his work economically, by multiplying themselves and so on. Rather original. I like it."

"Yes very. I'll buy it."

"Don't you want to know how much it costs first?"

"I am told that this is not the way with art."

"Oh indeed, indeed it is so. I'll fetch his notebook and I'll tell you in a minute. Would you like to come into the living-room?"

Some living-room, not a place to sit, bacon grease

hanging in the air like thick soup.

"I'm afraid I can't ask you to sit down. No furniture as you can see."

"It's quite all right."

"Unless you'd like to squat on the floor, on that blanket. It's clean."

"No I'll stand. Thank you."

"Here in this pile somewhere. Oh here it is. *Economical Universe* . . . Three hundred and eighty dollars. Well it is rather large."

"Would a cheque do?"

"Yes of course."

And I rolled the universe and took it out to her shiny Jewish canoe and said bye-bye now, do come again, and won't you have dinner with me tonight. I can't really. A drink then, I'd like to have a chance to get to know you, artists must have intercourse with art lovers. I mean communicate. I guess that really stumped her, because she said yes, and I kicked a kid away from her car without her noticing it, and that night I spent a quarter of the *Economical Universe* on her and afterwards I went up to the penthouse to assist her with the frame and the picture and when she was kneeling on the floor I made a crawling tackle and rolled on the carpet a couple of times because she was resisting until with dextrous hand and mouth I got to plug both ends of her so that the resistance died inside of her like an asphyxiated snake. And I always found that pulling the elastic down is similar to some wobbly sticky drawer on a chest, you've really got to work, first one side then the other one, inch by inch. And I really kind of loved her in those days, I didn't really marry her for her money, only I guess her money made a good idea out of marriage which otherwise, who knows. And I think she loved me too. I'm kind of dashing really, sexy too I think, but not a good liar, not yet anyway. So now she wants a divorce. Maybe since I got a raise. No, money is not the object, money for the sake of money most likely. And now

Lynn, just bumped into her in a cemetery, what does she want, the saving complex maybe? Mother-type I guess. Please don't save me, world. My mother was saved by a red-haired Irish priest in the bush, the whole town went red-headed in a few years, and as I came down the trail with Judy on my arm I saw them behind a cord of wood, and he said come here Steve, here take a bottle of beer and go son. And she said beat it kid, because I was just staring at them. And then I thought that I was being punished for my sin and God must have sent his emissary direct, to lay my mother in the hardwood mulch, which is pretty good for a halfbreed that she was. A good drinker though. I don't know what they mean when they talk about the alcohol problem of Indian and Metis. Nothing wrong with them and alcohol. Boy that town of ours must have been worse than Sodom, most of grade one and two were red-headed, fair-complexioned kids with hair in their teeth. Mixing the blood for a superior race, and stingy God thinking of something as inexpensive as sex to populate his economy class universe. That took the concept of sin out of me anyway, I had thought I was doing something terrible laying them on the mulch and sure I was in the wrath of God at least and that would improve our communion. Hell! If Myra wants a divorce she can have it. I can go and live with Aris. Maybe stay here for a little while. Maybe move in with Lynn and let her save me for a while. And Frank who got his doodad bit by a pecking chicken while he was masturbating in the chicken house. Good Lord had his fancy ways in those days. That's how I got my Indian blood in the first place. As the story goes this trapper, my great grandfather, sold half of Arrow Lake for a whore and a bottle of whiskey. The whore was a crazy Indian and eventually out of that deal came me Steve Canada, half whiskey, half whore and a dash of wilderness. Grandpa the trapper died in a well, somebody must have chucked him down there because he wasn't drunk, and dad, (a touch of tragedy in the family) died

on a very beautiful Hallowe'en day, I mean Hallowe'en is usually miserable weather, but it was beautiful weather the day he died in the shit house. Some kids had tied the bloomy thing to a row of freight cars loading pulpwood right behind our lot and outhouse, and he was inside when the thing took off for the mill. Half the funerals we had in our town people didn't know whether to laugh or cry, they did both after my father died. The bloody train just dragged him in his box right along the bloody back fences of everybody's place and they all heard him cursing and yelling inside until he reached the bridge over Rat Creek. Half way across the wire snapped, like on an elevator and he went crashing to the bottom of the ravine. And you'll never guess how my mother died. She fell head first on an axe on the bedroom floor upstairs. I don't know how she managed that, she was rather bottom heavy she was, anyway that's what they said at the inquest, accidental death. I get the feeling sometimes that I have quite a tradition to maintain. A bit too much for me maybe. Anyway a divorce sounds good right now. My imagination must be anaemic, I get constantly surprised at the things going on around me. I'm never prepared for the next. One blow after another. Take this Lady Russell now, I thought she was a nut! Telling me she was going to strip in front of me and then I couldn't resist her. I figured that was a hell of a good way to make me run, but no, she was right and I was wrong, dead wrong. The things people will do.

And Myra asked me one day, how deep do you think it is inside of me? I said I don't know, I'm not equipped with sonar down there. And she cried, tears streaming down her face, saying that I was vicious and always making fun of her and from there on our sexual relations were never the same. A bit strained. Now she sleeps with her back turned to me and every time I feel like starting something I have to edge close to her and nudge her a little in the mandolin with it, and half the time she's

liable to say what do you want, or what is it? Which is totally decompressing. I just wanted to give you a little tune up darling! Not now, I'm tired. Tired hell, put away my grease gun, no tune ups today. When? Tomorrow maybe. Maybe uh!

Divorce is a good idea. I don't need three hundred bucks a month from anybody. I can go to work. I'm strong, intelligent, young, healthy! It does seem a bit of a waste of these qualities I must admit. Maybe that's what's wrong with this world. Guys like me get locked up in factories and loaded down with mortgages and wives and kids. I want out I guess, because I'm neither stupid nor mean enough to fit anywhere at all. And that's what's wrong with this generation, hippies and the like, they are neither stupid nor mean so they just can't fit. I hope there'll be more of them coming, things will have to change then. Either that or one more go at it with bombs and gases, the whole works. Mercy annihilation.

Stephen pouring himself a drink and lighting a cigarette, walking around the room and out down a hallway to the other parts of the apartment, inspecting bedrooms, bathrooms, peering inside closets and one door let him into the studio again, out to the terrace. Walking the two sides of the building and checking his back pocket to feel the crisp paper worth a thousand dollars. Coming back to the living room and finding Sara there, standing by the bar, pulling a six inch pin out of her head and removing the large Garbo hat with a tired expression.

"Oh there you are. You didn't go out?"

Stephen swallowing the drink as though it were medicine, watching Sara unfurl the silk scarf from around her neck and placing it on top of hat and pin on a bar stool. "You should see the marks you have left on my neck. I bruise easily you know."

"I wonder what marks you left on me, and I don't bruise easily."

Stephen moving behind the bar, leaning on it and peering into Sara's face. Her small eyes covered with crimpily skin shingles for a moment and then her forehead drew up like a Venetian blind opening them.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean it was a traumatic experience for me, I feel classically depraved."

"Whoa, whoa, what an imagination."

"You are evil Sara, do you know that?"

She sat down on a stool and placed a cigarette between her thin clammy lips, lit it and took a long deliberate draw of smoke from it, hissing it out slowly from a slit in her mouth, first downward then by correcting the angle of the slit, upwards and finally through her rather large hairless nostrils.

"Now what makes you think that?"

"I feel it. I feel it in my bones!"

"Now darling, how could you feel *my* evil in *your* bones?"

"I don't know, I just feel it, that's all."

"I suggest that you feel your own evil darling. Pour me a drink will you. And anyway the possibility is not a matter of concern to my mind."

Stephen pouring, "Don't you know that you will go to hell?"

"Oh-oh-ohoh-oh! You are very amusing."

"Don't you believe in hell and damnation and eternal fire and all that jazz?"

"Oh dear, do you?"

"Of course I do, I have to, I'm not rich and powerful like you are. You must be stinking rich?"

"That I am darling."

"You are also attractive. In a way."

"Thank you!"

"I mean, you have class. Class is sexy, I have always had a kind of erotic attraction for the Queen Mother for example. I think that's what keeps the Commonwealth together, still. Now I mean a lot of frustrated jerks like

me trying to keep their fucking dreams alive."

"A trifle coarse but an interesting hypothesis."

"To tell you the truth I would have given it to you for nothing, free, just to think of all the money you have makes me want to screw you."

"I don't know whether to be flattered or offended."

"But I won't do it again I tell you. I guess that's why I have waited here instead of blowing off to spend your money on some pretty little thing. I wanted to tell it to you, the way it is. Funny isn't it."

"Alarming, but experience has taught me to be optimistic in such cases."

"No, I'll never be back. Once I go through those elevator doors I'll never come out of them again."

Lady Russell showing a little distress, there are exceptions to the rule. I'm about the commonest exception to every damned rule there is. I'm like Macbeth really, Caesarian and all. They say my mother didn't want to have me, and believe it or not there was nothing the doctor could do to induce me to come out of her. They had to tie her up because she knew they were going to open her up to save me, and she, knowing better for my sake at least, put up a fight, she could fight that woman, very strong she was, wild as a wildcat in heat. She knocked two nurses and a doctor out cold before they were able to tie her down, and dad had to come into the delivery room, drunk and laughing all the time to help them because they couldn't do anything with her. And finally they did, and got me out of there and to this day I don't know whether I was lucky or not. And now Lady Russell thinks I'm just talking through my hat, but I know that when I say something I stick to it, not because of pride, hell I don't have an ounce of it anywhere on me, but because I want to know that I can be master of my own miserable lot. She thinks she's got a leash on me with this thousand dollars and Ferrari bit, and if I want some more I have to come back for it, crawling. She'd like that I'm sure. I guess that's why she

gave me the money in the first place, to have me go out and have a hell of a good time, and then to have me crawl back to her. Nosir.

Stephen pulling the money out of his pocket holding it in front of his nose and sending Lady Russell's mind out in search of reassuring answers.

"You think this will bring me back don't you. You must have developed a system. I guess you like it the second time more when they come crawling. That's why you left isn't it? To tempt me! But I didn't bite, did I?"

Sara's mummified face finally getting some colour, heart pumping fury through the small hardened vessels, liquefying.

"Who told you this? Was it Lynn Rennie?"

"No, nobody told me, don't worry. She doesn't know you as well as I do."

Lady Russell getting up and walking stiffly away, stopping in the middle of the living-room and standing there for a minute with her back turned to Stephen.

"Get out!"

"Not yet."

"Get out I said!"

Lady Russell turning around, a mean streak in her on top of everything else. Stephen moving slowly towards her, smiling strangely.

"Don't come near me, I warn you!"

"Oh come on Sara, I feel sexy."

Her face quivering all over the place, knees buckling, eyes darting evaluating various possibilities of defense. She makes an attempt to run out of the room, and Stephen reaches her with one leap, arms around her, mouth screaming and legs off the floor kicking.

"I'm going to screw you Sara. Heh-heh-heeee."

Steve giggling carrying the screaming kicking bundle down the hallway to the studio, repeating over and over, "I'm going to screw you Sara, I'm going to screw everybody! Everybody! Eeeeeveryboddddddyyyy!"

Six

"So you see Aris, my dear friend and son of a bitch, I finally feel like somebody has turned the light on, inside of me. Would you say that's kind of strange?"

"Come on Steve baby, pal and sucker emeritus, dish out the dough will you. Pile it up here on the palm of my hand bill by bill. I'm so excited and tense you couldn't pass a needle up my arse. Sweet Jesus show it to me at least."

"First I have to finish my story. And don't interrupt me or I'll just get up on my legs and walk out of here."

"Christ no. I'll listen. Hurry up will you."

"All right! So I promise Myra I'll commit adultery as soon as I can with somebody else, because she just wouldn't have the idea of naming Lady Russell correspondent. I really think she is scared of her. She will fork out five thousand dollars as soon as the deal goes through and then I'm on my own. So tonight we are going to have a nice quaint little party here, and if we remember there will be some pictures taken after which I'll collect half of it and the other half after the completion of the legal paraphernalia. Then my dear friend I shall retire in my private stateroom for a little trip to the sunnier part of this globe and you shall never see or hear of me again."

"Is that it?"

"That's it."

"Now cough it out, gimme-gimme-gimme!"

Aris's big fleshy hand extended and paddling the air between them, eyes burning and tongue sticking out. Stephen pulling out a bundle of crisp bills and placing them in his hand.

"A thouuuu-sand dollars!"

"Nine hundred and ninety-two, I sent Lady Russell five and three this morning, I didn't have any change last night."

"Wow!"

Aris speechless, in the middle of the room which has a new cardboard partition, Stephen leaving him there and inspecting the labels and the engineering of it. Shaking it a little to test its solidity and stress ratio, going in past the same grey CPR blanket he had given Aris years ago when he had worked as a porter for the CPR on the Toronto to Winnipeg run. Dark inside and fresh smell of feet and gut hair like a thin onion skin on a volume of yellowing, fading, previous testimony of presence and bodily functions. Phew! Stephen inspecting the toilet and sink and the sweating cast iron pipe coming down from the center of a stratified expanding stain in the ceiling, coming straight down behind the cigarette scarred top of the tank and then after a confluence of y's and elbows proceeding to immersion in the cement floor.

Stephen moving to the small window hung high on the cement wall. Attempting to open it, and in failing to do so tearing down the tattered greasy plastic. Under a shower of warm fresh air from the weedy garbage littered back yard. Breathing in with relief and zest. Moving to the iron bed now, where the form of Aris is impressed on the gutted mattress, and unfolding the grey sheet which is twisted around so many times as to look like a piece of ship's rope. Stephen, swinging the sheet hits the mattress with it, blowing fluff and crumbs out of the depression, taking a peek at the underside of the mattress by lifting it up at its edge, and considering the rust patterns of springs and coils printed on it. Then lets it fall back and spreads the grey sheer on it, smoothing out the million creases with his hands and then taking another look. Tilting his head and twisting his mouth. Sitting carefully on the edge of it and then lifting his legs in and lying down, bouncing a bit till it sounds like

an old truck. Aris coming in through the blanket with the money in one fist and looking at Steve.

"What are you doing?"

"Cleaning it up a little, making it suitable for sex. This orange box will have to go Aris. I don't go for Swedish, contemporary, whatever. I like the split level garden though, nice for afternoon cocktail parties if we can think of a way to crawl up the hole. Ladies first."

Aris picking up the piece of plastic from the cement floor, taking a quick look then tossing it out through the empty window into the cocktail garden. Walking to the bed and standing over Stephen he lets the bills fall one by one like leaflets on top of Steve.

"Eeee-eh-eh." Steve lifting his head and looking over them and across to his feet. "Warm feeling Aris, warm and protective." Aris bends down and with hand like a steam shovel gathers a bunch of them, lifts them up like a crane and then lets them snow on him again. Now he bounces around the room on a pogo stick and wepppp-ppeeee! Then comes back, hurriedly picks them up again one by one, stacking them neatly on the other hand and rushes off with them pursued by Stephen. Up the stairs goes Aris kicking and Stephen with a hold on his pants and foot.

"Let go! Let go!"

"Ahaaaaah! Watch it will you. Give it back to me!"

"Let go or I'll kill you."

And up on the sidewalk looking down the stairwell, a crowd of people gathering, the flower kids, costumes of defeat. The litter fluttering waste of affluence up Main Street, the bits collecting in the gutter of fecund society like Lazarian crumbs of a rich dead God's feast, flipping winds of haste and Yorkville a lazaret of screwball sanity. Mammon's undigested excrement, gathering on the wall to see two beasts down the cement steps, tangled hissing and grunting, blood pouring out of their teeth and fists pounding, exposed torsos out of tattered shirts gleaming in the sun.

A fist of ten and twenty dollar bills exploding and letting the petals scatter as in fall on the grunting animals and covering the stairs in blood. A guy's skinny hand reached down to pick one up crunched to a pulp by a boot. Aris in a sitting position now on the narrow stairs with Stephen's head locked on his chest with folding arms and Aris taking a minute to cast a glimpse up and around to see nobody sneaking down to gather spoils of the battle. Then a terrific spasm in his chest like an explosion in his lungs and a long screeching yell pouring out of the wilderness of his head and someone amongst the spectators commented, that was a ball clasp! Steve's head emerging grinning and bloody among the cheer of the crowd, wiping some of the blood onto his sleeve and licking his upper lip. Hands like a thousand birds picking the bills and wiping some off on his pants. Aris sitting and trying to breathe while holding the fork of his pants. When all the bills are safely in his pockets Steve retreats back inside followed a minute later by defeat personified. Arms down limp to the sides, and smears of blood on his hairy chest.

"That was the meecanest! Filthiest! Most despicable trick ever!"

"Eeeh eeeh! Eeeh, it was wasn't it? You taught me that one. I'm going to castrate you with my very own fluoridated teeth the next time. Eeec eeheehee! Just like dogs."

Stephen going through the blanket, running water in the dirty sink, looking at his face through the grease and dried out spit on the cracked mirror. Washing his face and splashing water all over himself. Aris coming in with his tattered shirt hanging from his hand and soaking it under the faucet to wipe his chest and neck. Then tossing it up out the open window.

"Haven't you got a towel?"

"No, no towels."

"Oh hell, look at the mess. How the hell can I go out now?"

"The pants are all right, just a bit of blood on your arse where you sat on it. Looks like you had your period."

Stephen going to the corner beside the bed, pulling out clothes from a large cardboard box, looking at each piece and then tossing them on the bed in disgust. Every piece out and then into reverse.

"Haven't you got anything decent to wear? What's this? Pants without a zipper? Ladies slacks?"

"Very good material though."

"You mean you wear these?"

"Only on special occasions, they're kind of dressy. Nobody notices that they haven't got a zipper. A little tricky and embarrassing though in public places, unless you have a dime. The last time I went in and started pulling them down the guy next to me edged away and then sneaked up the stairs before he had even finished."

"Eeeh-eee! You could snip a hole through, with the scissors."

"You can wear them if you like."

"No thanks, I'll wear this khaki shirt. Wash my pants before the blood dries up."

"Just burn a bullet-like hole in the middle of the stain, it's fashionable around here now. The Vietnam line. Guys pay twenty bucks for a pajama shirt imported from Saigon. Some are fakes, homemade. Just burn a hole with a cigarette."

"You're kidding? You mean they really wear them?"

"Yup! This guy came back from out west with one, and everybody wanted one right away. Some are pretty gory I tell you."

"Yikes." Stephen in his underwear, rubbing the material under the running water and being careful that the money doesn't drop out of his pocket. Aris sitting in bed, smoking a cigarette and watching him. Quiet in here because this place is three quarters under ground, and that window out there is just out of this world. Sounds from the country coming down from it. Whistling from a

clothesline and birds in the distance making noises like the teeth of plastic combs. Some kind of thrush. I don't know my birds very well. Except those that stay up here in the winter, like jays and whiskey jacks, chickadees, and crows. Too many in the summer. Of course I can tell a robin. I can't tell those out there now. Nice though. Reminds me of home. Not that nice I guess. But fresh air coming in at last in this tomb. This toilet really works. Good solid plumbing. And very convenient right by the bed.

Reminds me of this old fellow up north. Old Jack. He has been old for a long time, and some thirty years ago when he was as old as ever he decided to have a woman come up from town and kind of take care of him, do the cleaning and cooking and whatever because he was getting so old and lonely living out there on one side of Poverty Road, but no woman would come because he didn't have a well by the house in those days, and nobody wanted to go fetch the water down at the creek in the winter, and maybe even summer. He tried for a few years but woman after woman came and went and never stayed. So he got this other old fellow to come over one day, cut a branch off a hazel bush and walk around slowly until the rod pulled down. There is your water Jack! Right down here, and he scraped the dirt with the heel of his boot. Dig here, lots of water. And he dug one, he hit rock, then he dug another one and another one, they say he dug wells and wells one after another for ten years before he got water. He kept hitting this rock. The first time at fourteen feet, he thought it was a small one so he just filled it all up again and started digging another one a few feet away. Eighteen feet and he hit the rock again. This time instead of being flat, it was slanting down only summer was gone and he quit. A few guys came over in the spring to see the rock and from the way it was pitching away from the house and downhill they figured that another twenty feet would clear it for sure. Still plenty close to the

house Jack and there is water down there all right. A nice stream, it's running downhill this way. You can't miss it. And he started digging again, this time he got down twenty feet before he hit the same blasted rock. This time he had almost cleared it because it was dropping off very steeply. They say he was the best well digger in the whole region. Dug two wells every summer for years. As soon as the frost came out of the ground in the late spring the whole town would say, old Jack is gonna want to start digging soon. He was a little skinny stringy fellow, when he pulled his shirt sleeves up you thought he was made of old ropes inside instead of bones and he had a great big nose, red and blue and yellow lumps growing out of it and getting bigger each year till it looked like a bowl of fruits hanging from his face. But he had the small sunken bright eyes of a sow bear, he looked at you and you got a cold stream running down your back and tail. Anyway he'd come out and start his well. He'd start it plenty big, sometimes round sometimes square. If he had tamarack posts and steel rims from old cart wheels he'd make it round I guess. If not square. He'd dig down in the soft sand about eight or ten feet until he couldn't throw the dirt up any further, then he would narrow up the hole leaving a ledge on all sides so as to support two or three wide wooden planks and then when he got down another two feet or so he'd shovel the dirt on them for a while and then get up on it and shovel it out. Then once in a while he'd have to come out and move it away from the side of the hole. When the hole got pretty deep he'd put out four scantlings, down on each corner if he'd started a square well and then nail the board on them to hold the loose sand up. If it were round he'd use the tamarack poles and the rims. When he got down to around twenty feet he would have to tie a rope at the top of the well with a pail hanging from it, go down the ladder, fill the pail then go up again and pull the pail up, then go down again. Pail by pail. Down into the cool

damp and up in the hot summer, up and down, sweating dirt from his face and arms and eyes blinking out of what looked like a bone of the earth. I'd watch for hours at a time every time I had to go by there. I would sit on my bicycle with one foot on the fence for a while, watching the silent hole for the moment he'd stick his head up like a groundhog and then come out, shake the dirt from his clothes like a dog and start pulling the rope. It never occurred to me to help him while I was there. Nobody did. The whole thing was so pathetic I guess I didn't want to spoil it. And he dug and dug all around his place until he got water. Only this time he couldn't get any woman to come out and do the household chores because while he was digging wells for all those years people got accustomed to electricity and he didn't have any. By the time the hydro line went by his place and he got electricity they didn't want to go because he didn't have inside facilities. So after a few years of trying, he never gave up right away the old fellow, nosir, finally he got a plumber to come and install a pail-a-day right smack in the middle of the bedroom, which even the plumber who was from out of town thought was a good idea because it was right in front of his bed and him being old and everything. . . . So now the women started to come out again to his place and they would take one big look at the shiny white Bowl in the middle of the room and leave.

I left since then, but I have heard that he did move it, built a small addition for it, and then everything was all right until they started asking where the water was, and he pointed at the well not a hundred feet from the house and of course they wouldn't have that now. Old Jack must be a hundred and fifty years old by now if he is still alive, and he just had a hell of a lot of trouble keeping up with the times. He's getting further behind all the time. I think I have the same kind of trouble. I don't think anybody notices it really until another generation comes up but I guess you start getting behind things

from the time you are born and by the time you get to be eighty you really notice it.

This old Jack must have thought himself the grand Duke of Almaquin when he had the white bowl installed in his shack, because he was still relating that thing to the times when if you went somewhere with the team of oxen you had to bring along saw and axe to cut your way through the bush. And these here days are maybe some kind of new pioneer days with me and Aris ten years behind and not making any headway at all.

Steve back inside his pants and out where Aris was beginning to work on a canvas, profiles of people in assorted candy colours, kind of laying down like cards on shelves and a deep blue background of infinity. Other paintings stacked on the floor against the wall, and one great big one of men all covered in what looks like dripping tar, standing up on a chair. Aris busy with tins and jars of various sizes, stirring the liquid, looking at Steve as though he didn't know him. Sitting on the rocking chair and then getting quickly up again and pinching the wet seat of his pants away from the skin. Standing behind Aris, smoking and tilting his head.

"What the hell is that supposed to represent?"

"What do you think?"

"People on shelves?"

"Right!"

"No, come on, really, I don't understand *art*."

"Well that's what it is."

"Aris, do you really consider yourself an artist?"

"Yup. Why?"

"Just wondered, you don't look like an artist."

"What do I look like?"

"A butcher, or a voyageur maybe! I don't know. Not an artist."

Door open and getting dark out. Night most likely. A new bulb burning overhead. Aris with his canvas propped up on a homemade easel with *this side up* lettering on one side, by the light coming down from up there

Croesusland. Polyphemus's cave. And those out there who didn't make it to Boobieland squatting on the sidewalk, hanging from doorways. Dopey drones peeping, freaky peeping out of peeping dreambones and acid kettles. Evacuated gold brick sentinels, joyless sentinels of a peg-boy ship. Peeping out of dark. A moan of mutiny from this clink, and the four year skipper brave on the bridge to hold the joy-knob on course. Towards the brink on a placid ship on a gallop-polling-tamed chartered sea. Computerized trendwinds swelling projected quarterly sales up, up! Up and away to Boobieland where the intestinal bacteria has produced a better living mechanism to provide itself with grub, unsuspectingly brave fierce and deluded. An asseteria full of America kissers and these here eyeboards and blades with asses on sling peeping behind curtain fall to see the military generals carried on shoulders of the arrived and would be arrived of Boobieland. I like these kids but by gum they are going to be clobbered for sure because God's got a blue helmet and goggles and a night stick! Right there at the Golden Gates and gold barbed-wire. Off limits signs in heaven. Man can't save himself they say, not anymore than a hog can hope to become anything else than ham and bacon some time or other. Earmarked. Hell!

"Aris me friend, don't you think painting is a bit of a waste of time and effort."

Aristides turning, squinting, and wiggling a two foot long brush in front of Stephen's face. "Well I'm not going to get into another fight with you today. I'm just going to go on my way and you do what you please. So there."

"No I mean a waste of time period!"

"Maybe it is maybe it ain't. And then maybe everything might turn out to be a waste of time. So I waste my time my way and you waste it your way."

"I don't want to waste time. Precious thing time is! That's why I won't work or do anything for a living anymore, because that's selling time really. Isn't it?"

"I guess so, but what if you don't have anything better to do with it?"

"Oh come on. I mean just sitting on a sidewalk is better than work. I must meditate. That's what Aris, I must meditate."

"Oh-oho-ohoh-oh."

"Don't laugh now."

Aris with his hands outstretched toward Stephen like bumpers. "No don't you start hitting me again. God you are touchy!"

"I'm not touchy."

"Are all half breeds and Indians as violent as you are?"

"I'm not violent!"

"You got me into three fights in two days, brief but murderous. Now I didn't start them, you did! Wouldn't you call that a little indicative of a bellicose nature?"

"You said things and did things that brought them up. It's your fault not mine. Like saying that I should kill a little old lady with a hammer." Stephen taking big steps around the room like an oldtime waltzer or a werewolf, slashing the air with an invisible hammer, going wham! Wham! Face of late T.V. Fright night special, just swinging his hammer all over the place and Aris with a frozen brush sticking out of his fist watching him, hitting the air and mumbling through hate gravy in his mouth, saliva dripping from the corners of the mouth and dark shrunk pupils in his head like a rabid dog, still going smash, crash! Bang! Teeth grinning and blood on his hands, Aris after him with the brush, take it easy Steve, hey Steve, Steve! For Christ sake what's the matter with you, and Steve stopping in a hunched position, looking down, staring at the cement and panting. Aris looking at the cement floor and at him, not daring to come too close, watching him straighten up and turning to him with a far off grin on his face.

"Cripes. What you getting so excited for?"

"What?"

"Hell Steve, what's the matter with you? Are you going out of your pointed mind?"

"A bit of superb acting I would say, wouldn't you?"

"God I thought you were sick or something."

"I just can't stand violence. Must put an end to all the violence."

"That will be the day."

Aris a bit shook up, going back to his canvas, looks at it with a tired expression and decides to quit. Stephen sitting on the rocking chair watching him and smiling to himself.

"What have you got to smile about?"

"I was just seeing myself in a far-off land, sitting on a rock on the side of a mountain and eating figs and bread."

"Sounds terrific."

"Hey Aris. I'm hungry." Stephen bounced off the chair, stuck a hand in his pocket and pulled out his money under the keen interest of Aris. "Here is two hundred bucks Aris, no here, three hundred. Buy food and booze and invite everybody to the castle. Everybody! Just fill up the joint to the rafters. The king wants a party! Tell them to come to the King's party down in Polyphemus's cave."

"I thought you'd never get around to it. Steve pal, I take back everything I have ever said about you. Or thought. You are just a great guy. Mmmmm-ha! Mmm-m-ha!" Kisses on both cheeks, Steve touched, Aris looking at the money and his face making room for the greatest grin. Big red leathery hands with tufts of short hair on every knuckle dividing the bills, putting some in his back pocket.

"Eh, what are you going to do with those?"

"You don't think I'll spend all this loot on these creeps around here?"

"Aris I want a swell party, get lots of bodies in here, maybe soak up some of the arthritis and consumption swamped in these here walls, besides though I'm a little

conservative I like hippies. I like their philosophy about sex anyway. Why can't you like them?"

"Oh I like them. Never had one of them in here because they mistrust me. After all I was here long before they moved in. Maybe that's why. I'm not against them. Hell no!" He took the money from his back pocket and slapped it onto the rest in his hands. "Here, I'll show you! I'll give them a party like they never saw before."

seven

Stephen enthroned on the rocking chair under the painting of people in tar. The first guests hesitating at the door, peering into the dark and sniffing the air.

"Come in! COME IN!"

More people coming down the stairs and shoving the hesitant in. One stuck his head in dubiously and asked, "Is this where the hash is flowing tonight?"

"Free hash, and free ass, I hope."

More coming now, finding places to sit or stand, forming groups and a tall musketeer going around staring at the walls going "wow-ee! Just look at this place." His voice brayed as if he was talking through a kazoo.

Suddenly he tore out of the place and came back a minute later with tin cans of paint and brushes. Others followed with more paint, posters, magazine covers; rushing to the walls to stake claims, starting to paint everything in sight.

Stephen watching appreciatively. Place buzzing with all kinds of activities, getting crowded now and more coming. Screams on the stairs, a big clankety racket as a steel keg of beer bounced down the cement steps with Aris after it, steering it inside stopping in front of Stephen.

"Hey Steve, brought you some beer!" Big grin then a worried look around. "What the hell is going on here?" Looking at the walls, tits, belly buttons, hands and feet popping out of cans, splashes of luminous paint on the walls, and guys behind the partition painting the bowl and pipes in tiger stripes.

"What the hell? . . ."

"They're doing a good job Aris. Brightening up the

place."

The musketeer is suddenly elevated over the crowd, riding on someone's shoulders and going in circles around the light, painting a spiral, going "Groovy, groovy."

Crowd swaying evading the drips of black paint, pressing some of the artists against their own murals.

A guy came down with a case of booze and never made it past the entrance. Bottles of gin changing hands quickly. Aris all excited, yelling and trying to shove people out but not getting anywhere. Cardboard partition falling in one piece on the heads of those behind it and being pushed up again from the inside. Aris tried to shut the door but someone yelled, "Open up! Aris! It's me Chris. I've got more booze!"

Chris bearer of booze in with another case. Aris brought one bottle to Steve who was standing on a crate now observing the confusion from safety.

"Nice party you have here Aris."

Aris opening a white envelope. "I got two ounces Steve." Offering it to Steve.

Steve declining with a papal gesture. "Pass it around Aris. Multiply it."

Aris taking another envelope from his pocket and trying to save some for a rainy day, but bird fingers from around him reached over and pecked away.

"Hey wait a bloody minute. Don't shove you sonofabitch. Watch it!"

"Don't get excited Aris. You'll spill it."

A blond with luminous paint in her hair is pressed against Steve's legs, and she sits on his toes. Stephen wiggles his toes. She looks up.

"Come up, stand here with me."

A smile.

Steve and strange girl on the crate, arms around her to support her. Not much room she says. Crowd swaying suddenly as the beer keg is swung over Aris's head, gurgling suds pouring down his open, gasping mouth and running down his chest. Shouts and hurrahs, and boos when the

keg comes finally down again. Smoke coming up to form a layer over the bobbing heads.

"What's your name?"

"Meta."

"That's nice."

A bottle crashed to the floor and a girl screamed. Followed by laughter.

"My name is Stephen Canada. Hee-keek! True."

The musketeer rode again above the crowd and started painting the light bulb which went pop. Only the faint light coming from the street now. Sounds of strange goings-on down there.

Aaah! Stupid! Get your hands off me! Ooooooh, OOOOOOH. I beg your pardon! Eeeehh-eeee!

Aris's voice thundering above the racket. "Watch that wall!"

Then the sound of cloth being torn followed by the sound of a face being slapped.

"Something going on down there Meta!"

"Eeeek-keek!"

"You laugh funny Meta. I like you."

"Do you mind doing it on a crate?"

"Mind what?"

Stephen holding it in one hand and with the other bringing Meta's hand over to feel it. "Mind this."

"Aaaah! Put it away!"

"Hey don't push please. Oooo!"

Stephen falling in the dark, landing on people. A bit of panic.

"Hey! What the hell? Excuse me please."

Deciding to take his chances down here. Feeling something soft, examining it with his hand.

"Hey fella. Oops I beg your pardon."

Moving through the crunch, feeling his way, saying mentally this one no, and this one no, and what is this? This one yes! I think. But what is this?

"Is it taken?"

"Move on you jerk."

"Aris?"

"Steve?"

"Yeah!"

"I'll be done in a minute Steve. Here have a drink meanwhile."

"Hey who do you think I am?"

"You are a sweet girl, now don't pull out!"

A slap. Mademoiselle in distress.

"Aris you uncouth bastard. That's no way to treat a lady."

"Oh shir!"

Move on Aris. You're not a gentleman. Move on and turning to her, may I help you? He's a rather crude man he is. What's your name? I wish I could see you a little better, you must be beautiful. You feel nice. Here here don't be upset. No harm done, I believe I came just in time. Want a drink?

"Please!"

"You'll have to drink it from the bottle I'm afraid, no place for etiquette here."

"Awful place."

Took a drink though. And asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm a prince, European prince!"

"Oh go on."

"Truly, I'm also your host, and will feel miserable if you are not having a good time."

"I don't like this stuff for sure, what is it, gasoline?"

"Just gin I'm afraid."

"He ripped my panties off."

"He did? I don't believe it. I mean it is unheard of!"

"He did though."

"Let me take a look."

"Ugh ugh."

"Oh he did too! Unbelievable!"

"You are not any better."

"You feel nice though. My what roundness, firm, I'll buy you silk ones if you permit me."

"Mm no you won't."

Gently manoeuvring her mind back on the right track.

With one ear following Aris's progress through the crowd. More tearing, some screams and sounds of faces being slapped. A girl weeping, being escorted out, and others trying to come in.

And she is a little short which makes it difficult, but now she is helpful, on her toes. Rewarding struggle. And these miniskirts are dandy. I like miniskirts for all occasions, and Indian-style aprons even better.

And we were six years old, in a barn. Told her to take her clothes off because we were doctors. Me and Frank. He was all sex and pimples as far as I can remember. Lie down now we said, and being scared of doctors she did. But being only students we examined it with two short sticks, poking at it and everything. Then Frank being rather unimpressed stuck his stick in like a flag pole and she screamed, and from that time I have a certain reverence for it. And that silly girl told her mum, and soon the whole town was laughing at us, telling us that we would go to jail and some fucking bastard even told me that God was all upset. And once in a while I still think about it. Like now. And this perhaps is not the proper way.

"You still haven't told me your name."

"Kate."

"Oh Kate!"

An now it's better. And I gave Kate a string of pearls, they came out of me one by one, and she took them with a sigh and a violent shudder. Sobs came out of her mouth like large bubbles from the depth of her soul and dark mystery of life. Oh Kate stop this violent motion. There are people. And one of them behind Stephen shoved him rudely and protested.

"Hey! Goddamn creep, you knocked my hash down!"

"Pardon me your cuntship!" And forgetting his princely manners he struck him two-fisted on the side of the face.

More screams, real panic this time and Stephen is hit from behind, more imprecations and fists flying, and Aris letting out a chilling yippeeccc!

Going through the crowd like a tank, shoving smashing

yelling advancing towards Stephen and Stephen towards him, climbing over the bodies of the fallen.

More room now with the commotion pouring out into the street and in the middle of the room, Aris and Steve taking a minute off from the battle to grin at each other.

"Steve my boy I like you!"

"Same here Aris!"

And just as Aris aimed a fist at Stephen, Stephen crashed an empty bottle of gin over his head. Aris staggered. Shook his head incredulously and squinted at Stephen who was still holding the neck of the bottle in his hand.

"Ahhhhh Steve! That's not fair!"

"Christ Aris, you must have a skull like a Neanderthal man!"

Half of the defeated crowd still trying to escape through the door, and then suddenly they are turned around as there is a great commotion and sirens screaming outside.

A flashlight beam bounced in the dark and two cops were framed in the doorway. "This is the police. Nobody move!"

Steve and Aris tearing through the partition, pulling a guy down from the window because he was taking too long, kicking his legs over everybody's head and others trying to catch his feet so as to give him a push. Now Steve is hoisted up and shoved through by Aris. Out in the dark garden checking his bottle and his pant pocket, pulling Aris out of the hole and then giving a hand with another one and another one until a beam of light comes up to their faces a voice saying hey you, don't move! And who moved? We shot out of there and across fences and down alleys like outlaws. Stopping after a while to take a slug in the dark. Whoooo boy, that was close. I should say. You and your bloody parties! Not very respectable at all. Gee whiz we weren't doing anything wrong. Just drinking and that. You'd think they'd let us have some legitimate fun. Maybe they didn't know it was legitimate. Hell they should check first.

"Hey Steve, what do we do now?"

"We become fugitives."

"Come on. I mean I can't go back there tonight."

"I suggest you drop in on Lady Russell. She'll put you up for the night."

"You think she would?"

"Worth giving it a try."

"What will I say?"

"Give her a buzz, tell her you are an artist looking for a sponsor."

"At this time of night?"

"Artists don't think about things like that. Try to think like an artist."

Aris thinking, plotting avenues of hope to success and riches. A gallery and champagne glasses tinkling. . . . What a break. Out here amongst shadows of old cars and sagging garages it seems a world or two away.

"Here, give it another swig. Get some courage. She isn't that bad actually, suitable for marriage. Good companionship and door opening to high places."

"I'll do it."

"Atta boy! Just don't tell her you know me."

"Oh don't worry. I won't kick on an empty stomach. I need help. Boy I need help!"

"She is a patron of the arts Aris. I guarantee you she'll listen very attentively. Here let's finish this up so we can go to a phone booth without being molested by the police."

Me and Aris a bit like soldiers of defeat, walking down this narrow dark lane with hearts like fat cats crawling in the darkness and inside the theatre of thoughts a wrecker yard with late model dreams gutted out and rusting and new ones being built from parts like Franksteins of hope. And I know Aris will get his jalopy going someday, become a great artist, world renowned, maybe he and Lady Russell will go for a world cruise and the people that run the factories will read it in the morning paper.

Well known Toronto artist Aristides Bowels Buckney

and Mrs. Buckney, formerly Lady Sara Russell, left Canada today for a world cruise. Mrs. Buckney denied rumours that their long journey was necessitated by Mr. Buckney's health. This is a purely sentimental journey, she told reporters and friends gathered at the dockside, a chance to dedicate a year of our lives to ourselves. So be it.

"Aris my friend I see a bright future for you if you play your cards right."

"I hope so."

"I'm positive."

And out on College Street we cornered a telephone booth, Aris inside under glass.

"Lady Russell? My name is Aristides Bowels Buckney. You don't know me Lady Russell. Nobody knows me. Yet! But I'm an artist Lady Russell, a great artist I think and I have heard that you are a patron of the arts."

Aristides Bowels Buckney indeed. He'll do!

Eight

Stephen left Aris at the corner of College and Yonge, left Aris and another fifty dollars. Generous heart and Aris needed some money to buy a new shirt and trousers for the appointment with Lady Russell in the afternoon of the following day. Must make a good impression Steve. Yeah sure, but don't go there all spruced up and without a crease like a cheap Woolworth gigolo. Play it cool man. Walk into the lion's mouth with a halo over your head. A bit of artist negligence about your person will give the touch. Yeah, yeah! Sure sure!

Drove home in a cab, tiptoed through the hall and found Myra packing suitcases. Threw one glance my way like I was a mere noise. A mean shadow under her chin. Eleven thirty and she is packing. Things strewn all over the living-room and a bunch of legal papers on the coffee table.

Steve watching her for a minute and then moving to the bar, casting a forlorn look at the Donilo painting beside him. Watching her making quick martial trips to her bedroom and carrying clothes, folding them in, pressing them down and looking about for a shoe to fill in the sides. A mean shadow under her chin as I said, funny thing, you can tell by the shadows on one's face what kind of mood she's in. When she's in a miserable mood she's all shadows.

"What are you doing Myra?"

"Packing, can't you see?"

"Can I help?"

"No thanks. You can sign these papers if you like."

Stephen walking to the coffee table, a side glance at the papers, picking them up gingerly and with a worried look.

"What are they?"

"Application for a divorce."

"Application for a divorce. Is that how it is done?"

Myra shaking her head, going on with her packing, a little bit more shady under the chin.

"I'm going to obtain a divorce through Scotland, my lawyer tells me. It takes a while and it is kind of complicated but legal and they guarantee I'll obtain it."

"Scotland, my God." Taking a quick drink. "What if I don't sign?"

"Up to you." She slammed the suitcase shut with finality. "It doesn't really matter anymore. I'm leaving tomorrow. If you sign I'll give you the money you have asked for, if you don't you'll get nothing. It's up to you."

"And where are you going?"

"To Israel."

"TO ISRAEL!"

"Yes, to Israel."

"You're kidding! I mean why to Israel?"

Myra walks over to the coffee table, picks up the papers and holds them out to Steve as though it was an old newspaper. "You want to sign or not?"

"If I don't sign would you take me to Israel with you? There are great caves in Israel!"

"Sign or don't sign, then go where you like."

"I'll sign. Where is the money?"

"First sign!"

"You don't trust me? I'm your husband. Let me just see it, OK?"

"Ugh ugh, and you talk of trust!" She went back to the chesterfield where her suitcase was and her bag and came back with a cheque in her hand. She held it in front of Stephen. "Here. Certified!"

"Gimme a pen quick!"

Back to the purse and bringing him a pen. Myra's finger pointing at the crosses on the dotted lines. Four signatures. And another tall drink. Reading the cheque, folding it in his black wallet and a smile.

"I'm sorry our marriage didn't turn out. I really am

Myra."

"Huh!"

"I mean I really thought you only wanted sex, or needed it and I needed security. What did you really want?"

"It doesn't matter now."

"Sure it does, I want to know if it was my fault. I feel responsible. What are you going to do in Israel for heaven's sake?"

"You'll never believe it."

"You aren't going to a kibbutz?"

"Yes."

"Ooooh-oooh-oh and ooooh-ohh-oooh! Myra darling you have flipped."

Stephen hopping to the middle of the room, disregarding Myra's sour look. Spreading his arms like a magician about to perform. "I can just see you darling, driving a tractor, submachine gun in the holster, Biblical sun emerging from the rugged red granite hills of Palestine, casting long lurking shadows upon the land of Jacob. Danger, death and glory, and yes, God! Never further away than the whispering of the wind on the eucalyptus trees. . . ."

"Oh, funny, very funny!"

"Listen, do you know what they do there? They pluck chickens, mold cement blocks and dig ditches. You don't see much glory doing that here. Why the hell do you think it'll be so noble over there?"

"None of your business, but if you really want to know I'm going to be a teacher."

"Oh great! Lots of luck!" Stephen walking up and down, pacing his fury. Myra ignoring it. "You Jewish people stink. STINK! You hear? Worse than Negroes or Indians. I just can't stand people with special status, group status or whatever it is. National, religious or racial you all stink. That's what I think."

"All right, so we stink."

"Yes, absolutely."

"Fine."

"Don't you humour me. I know what I'm talking about. I'm saying that anybody that ain't got the guts to stand up out there all alone in front of God and stick a finger up his arse, without a flag waving and band playing, is a stinker! A dumb fat arsed critter, a foetus of a soul not worthy of hell or heaven. That's what you are Myra, a foetus in search of a womb. You don't want to come out, you are a . . ."

"Go ahead, you can say it."

"A Jewish pig! What do you think you are really doing?"

"I don't know. Right?"

"Right!"

"But you will tell me."

"Yes."

"Go ahead."

"You are just going there, to Israel, the womb, up a metaphorical cunt because you don't want to be Myra Rosenburger period. That's too little for you, got to hitch on to something big."

Myra finished up her second suitcase and left with some clothes, Stephen following her to her bedroom, a bit of confusion gathering in his mind, loose ends, too much to say and do, and time a bottle neck letting things pass one by one and one must rely on his judgment as to which one should come first. Often things get stirred up by emotion and small things are caught and big things missed.

"When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow."

"Gee, tomorrow. What will I do?"

She turned around smiling. "Why don't you go way out there, stand up all by yourself, under God, and do whatever you said people should do."

"Eee-ehhe-eeeh! Very good." Shaking a patriarchal finger at her. "I will, don't you worry. As soon as I know exactly how best to express it. I mean you know that I was just using it as a figurative analogy. I mean sticking the

finger up one's arse isn't the real thing actually."

"No, what is it then?"

"I don't know just yet. Wish I did, the idea is there! I really want to do it don't you worry."

"Well whatever it is Stephen, I hope you find it. I hope I found mine. God knows everybody needs it."

"Yeah, that's true. Well I still think I'm right, what I said anyway, but I'm not holding a grudge against you. If I talk like that it's because I love you really. Don't misunderstand me, you don't know what kind of love I'm talking about. That's the kind of love that makes me say things like that about Jews and Negroes. I actually love all the bastards."

"Gee thanks!"

"Nothing phony about it, I really do love all the sonsof-bitches in the world."

Myra banging a drawer shut, expressing unwillingness to pursue the subject, Stephen following her into the living-room again, watching her tidy up, place the suitcases on the floor side by side, and slipping the divorce papers in a big envelope.

"What about this place?"

"There will be some real estate people in tomorrow. You can stay until it is sold."

"And the furniture?"

"Goes with it."

"Can I have the cheap Universe?"

"What for?"

"For sentimental reasons."

"You can't. It would leave an empty wall."

Stephen walking around musing, scratching his head, nodding gesticulating his hands, reviewing the covered ground. Myra with a mellow look.

"You can have the car."

Nine

I drove Myra to the airport today. Carried her suitcases for her, an embarrassing moment when they announced her flight. Didn't know whether to kiss or shake hands. Teetered on our feet.

"Well!"

"Well, that's it then."

"I guess so. Take care uh."

"You too, and lots of romance."

"Bye."

"Bye."

And afterwards I rushed back to the penthouse, pulled the cheap Universe down and rolled it, carried the colour T.V. set down the elevator to the garage and chucked it in the trunk. The stereo set wouldn't fit. Filled the back seat of the car with liquor, cigarette boxes, small antiques and a wooden horse. Yanked the cut crystal chandelier from the ceiling and was going to open the door when the real estate woman came in.

"It fell off!"

"Are you Mr. Canada?"

"Yes, nice of you to put it that way. I'll have this chandelier up for you in no time."

A suspicious look. I can tell she is a hardened business woman. Followed her in to the living-room with the chandelier hanging from my hand. She takes a dirty look at the hole in the ceiling with the hanging wires. The empty coasters on the floor.

"Your wife gave me instructions that the furniture would be included."

"Ah, yes, indeed, beds, armchairs, dining-room set, the whole shebang."

"Television?"

"I'm just taking it to the repairman. Tube went click!"

"It isn't necessary."

"I insist."

Business woman with a hardened heart looking at the empty frame leaning against the wall.

"I was given the painting for a keepsake."

Inspecting the dining-room, and then the bedrooms, Steve attempting to place the chandelier on the floor but the pieces came apart.

"You know you are not supposed to remove fixtures."

"I wouldn't dream of it. If you don't mind I have to go now. I believe you have the keys?"

"Yes."

"I'll leave the chandelier here. I'll have it installed as soon as I can."

"Fine."

Sheeessus what a woman! Thinking I would remove the fixtures. Just for that I should rent a truck and get every stick of furniture out of the place. One must stoop low at times, pride is a fence, and if Aris moves in with Sara I can stay at his place for a while. To reflect upon the new roads open to me. Must not make grave decisions under strain and impulsively. Maybe that's how Myra got the idea of going to Israel. She was under strain I believe, plus the common syndrome of parasitism. Hitching on to something big and noble. A cause. Flag waving for Pete's sake. I'll have none of that! There is nothing bigger and better than Sint Stephen Canada, a bit underdeveloped I admit, but wait till I move into that cave way down there in Calabria. Simple life and concentrate on the Atman. Legs folded, eyes half shut fixed to a point in the middle of the forehead. Dissolve into cosmic experience. A feeling of darkness, and I guess everybody strives for eternity.

People on the sidewalk casting a look at the car with the trunk flapping open and shut and the man inside singing in a fine baritone voice, *Has Anybody Seen my Jesus*.

He parked the car on a side street and walked up Yonge

to the little Catholic cemetery. Going to say farewell to a dead friend. Woman on a back porch shaking a rug watched him walk up the narrow path, sitting down on the tall twitch grass and leaning his head against a tilted stone. Hot sun up there and a bit of wind blowing here and there like ghosts playing a football game in this bone orchard.

"Well my friend, I'll be going away soon!"

"Like hell you are!"

"Yessir, I am! I'm retiring from the world. I'm going to become an ascetic. That's what. There is no love left in this world my friend. No love left. They have even made pills out of Jesus, they have. And you know something? I don't give a damn anymore. Not a pinch of shit. Up with libido power! If God doesn't want to wipe us out we are going to wipe out God. Serves Him right too, all this peek-a-boo-stuff is a fraud. I guess He can't do anything about it anymore than I can. So I'm cutting out. Everybody for himself I think."

"So you are going to fold your tail and yip away."

"I'm not doing any such thing. I'm just being realistic, that's what."

"Then I suggest that you consider keeping a goat in your cave, for milk and you know what. A tall pair of boors too, so that you can stick the hind legs in them in case the beast is recalcitrant. I hear that pretty soon they get a liking for it and become affectionate."

"You fucking cadaver!"

"Eee-eeeh!"

"The days of the prick are over for me. I'll cut it off first! Send it to Louise. I never knew anybody that could put it to so many uses. She'd shave with it, put it under her armpits like a thermometer, use it as a brush to powder her nose, lipstick, plunger, just about everything but put it in. She can have it when I'm down there. I dreamed once that life was a party, everybody dressed up elegant and pleasant, laughing and drinking and I was naked. I tried to get them to look at me but they couldn't even see me. I screamed and yelled but no

luck, and this butler kept coming after me with a tuxedo, saying that if I wanted them to see me I had to put it on. Which was a queer thing as dreams go because usually I would dream that I forgot my pants at home and somebody would see me and I would die of shame. Anybody will tell you that this kind of dream expresses the necessity of feeling shame, and there I was trying to feel it but nobody could see me. Very frustrating I tell you. So I finally killed the butler who was only trying to be helpful even though he was dumb enough not to see what I really was trying to do."

"Oh well, I know what you need then!"

"What, go out in the streets naked?"

"No, kill somebody! Maybe a nice little old lady with a hammer! A catalyst for your vague feeling of shame and guilt. That little lady you met Sunday! You liked her, kill her Steve."

"Aaaaahhh!"

"What's the matter?"

Steve up and about stamping a snake into the turf, fists beating the side of his own head like a band drum, doing a tarantella.

"Hey, stop bouncing up and down and tell me what's wrong."

"You fucking bastard!"

"Ah cut it out!"

"I won't do it I tell you. I couldn't"

"I would if I were you. You need it man, boy you need it! Cursing God and making fun of Jesus is not good enough for you, not anymore. You've got to blaze a new trail Steve. You are an artist and you must express the insensibility of the world around you. Something senseless like that would develop your soul and a glimpse of reason. You do it and you'll be standing out there all by yourself. Nobody will be able to touch you anymore. You'll be in the fifth dimension."

Ten

Fifth dimension my arse. Why would I do a thing like that? A sense of tragedy? Self realization? Phony bastard that Patrick! Thinking that I would do that just to show the bastards what they are. Maybe get Jesus to shed a tear or two. Never! I'll sit here and meditate.

Steve, in Aris's basement, sitting in front of the colour T.V. set. Something went wrong with it during the moving and there is only a dot of light flicking off and on in the middle of the amethyst screen. Cardboard partition folded and stamped down to one side, broken bottles and a piece of black nylon panties shoved to a corner, beer and paint coagulating on the floor and drunken flies buzzing over it. Night coming to the city as on the stage, with the dimming of lights and the turning on of spotlights. Outside there are some goings on of human nature but I don't want to take part. All alone with my misery for a while. No more marching down University Avenue to the American consulate for me. No more sleeping in bags in front of City Hall. I'm out of all this misery on the stage. I'll sell the car and T.V. and install a few comforts when I get there. Maybe air conditioning, a broadloom and a goat for milk isn't a bad idea. Only for milk, though I know it is difficult to ignore pleasure if even from a critter like that. Imagine his gall to suggest something like that! Just like an Irishman. More tail and more milk that's what my dad, God rest his soul, said about our cow, and mum who was dirtier than a cow's arse anyday, said, filthy man. And I gave up milk. But he was right, and honest and that's what's lacking above everything else, like this Trudeau mon choux, who is supposed to take care of me

but can't stop worrying about his own hair. Well God-damn it Jesus how can you stand for that? Oooo that makes me sick. And I have a touch of it too, devious bastard I am! Never saying what's on my mind, have to act civilized all the time, like if tail was the furthest thing from my mind when I meet a good looking chick. Hi how are you? What's your name and all that educated malarky. And that's why I don't go to church too, I mean if I heard a sermon about how we have to be good and love our neighbour and stuff like that I'd Goddamn puke right at crucified Jesus' feet, I would. All that singing and joy and when I received my confirmation amongst some other shmucks, a bunch of old broads sang, Oh We the Virgins of Jesus, and I felt like I was being castrated. The damn things they put in your head. Congratulations Steve, now you belong to Christ! Soldier of Jesus you are. And everybody kissed the Bishop's ring, and I did too though I felt like an ass because I thought everybody else knew why they were kissing the ring and I didn't. So I went ahead and kissed it feeling involved in a great big mystery, miles of blue heaven in my head and the puzzling presence of God.

Stephen restless, gets up, walks to the blinking T.V. set, looks at the dot of light for a minute and then, bangs his fist on it. Dot of light exploding, covering the screen with light and then picture appears, the picture of a rice paddy and a skinny guy in black pajamas being dragged out of the water, being propped up and shoved with rifle butts in front of Stephen. Guy full of wonder and fear staring at him square in the eyes and as though Stephen had suddenly given an order to soldier standing guard beside him he gets his face smashed in by the arse of an M.1., and Stephen's boot went right to Vietnam. Right through the glass and everything, thunder and crackling lightning of the electronic hell and Steve's foot is almost disintegrated. Runs to the door and watches the set sizzling and smoking like a dying monster. When it's fairly safe again, he goes back and pours himself a

drink with shaky hands.

Two quick drinks and the reappraisal of twentieth century dilemma, do you watch it, or not watch it? Do you really believe that you can't do anything about it or is it just comfortable? Who the hell wants to get his head busted by the pigs? And the C.B.C. provides expiatory programs for those who choose impotence. Two thousand V.C.'s were killed today. Christ! Just like injuns they kill 'em. Massacred a whole town from the chief down to the last squaw. Wheee! Custer rides again! and again. And again! Kerist will he ever stop riding the sonofabitch? Who will be the next injuns? But oh, he looks good when he rides out of the fort at the head of his troops. He looks real good I must say, almost makes me wish he'd never run out of injuns. Eee-eeh! I'll drink to that. That's the truth. Sit down here dear friend, have a drink and some pretzels while we watch this guy being shot in the arse for the security of the free world. But I tell you one thing my friend, I'm leaving tomorrow. I am leaving tomorrow.

Eleven

Wednesday afternoon, Stephen with a blue flight bag walking downtown. Toothbrush and new leather bound Bible in it along with passport and a first class ticket to Greece, a last minute change. Toronto is a modern Cinderella City, a working class woman without husband or reputation and with an eye open for either. Something in leaving that discovers new faces, brings familiar places into sharper focus. A glow of sadness stirring, within the long winter of failure, the widow of love, regret. Over my heart passed the shadow of a bird of prey, dark wings of gloom circling above. Hope in the future built on the rubble of the past.

If the big steel bird crashes I'll be set free like wild circus animals in a train mishap. The mind must accommodate the will to survive with constant delusions. How can delusions of the morrow make today bearable? Better days ahead my friend! Better days my arse. Free sex in the streets would be about the only way, I figure our whole civilization is the result of a controlled supply and demand for tail. Let everybody get it whenever they want it and for nothing and the whole structure will collapse. Everybody too pooped and not interested to screw his neighbour, metaphorically that is. Empires were built when tail was scarce and crumbled when tail was plentiful.

Five hours to take-off time and Stephen growing restless, went into a bar and in between drinks decided to phone Lynn.

"Hello, is Lynn Rennie there?"

"Lynn? Oh no! She's left. Who is speaking please?"

"Steve Canada, I'm a friend of hers. Where is she, do

you know?"

"She is on her way back home, to Newfoundland."

"Newfoundland?"

"Yes, she went back to get married. Gave up her career...."

"That's good, and what are you doing this afternoon?"

A moment of hesitation, fingers twirling the curly wire. Nice voice and disposition.

"I need company real bad!"

"I'm sorry, I'm busy this afternoon."

"Goodbye and take care of your bubblegum."

"What?"

Another coin and dial Lady Russell's number. If she answers it just hang up. Feel kind of lost. A hunk of lead in my chest and bird feet in my throat. If that big steel bird crashes in the Atlantic I'll be free. There will be heads rolling in heaven oh Lord! No use sending me to hell either, hell won't hold me. I'm coming straight up there swinging my fist oh Lord. Yessir! There will be changes made by gum!

"Hello? Aris?"

"Yeh, is that you Steve?"

"Yep, that's me all right."

"Where in hell have you been. I must have phoned your place a hundred times!"

"I slept at your place. How are things with you?"

"Super! Just super! I'll have to tell you all about it."

"I'm leaving at nine thirty-five, tonight. Going to Greece."

"To where?"

"Greece my friend!"

"Tonight?"

"Ycp, inside a big bird."

"Where are you now?"

"At the *Golden Egg*, having a drink or two."

"Just you wait there, don't move. I'll hop in my red Ferrari and be there in thirty seconds flat. Don't move."

OK?"

"OK!"

Sint Steve Canada perched on a stool, blue flight bag on his knees watching his face over a row of liquor bottles in the mirror behind them. Aztec face staring back. Wild eyes and dark choppy hair a bit ruffled, like wind gone by, and I have nothing against whores except I like the straight approach. Can't stand the class of this one, perching herself next to me in a largely empty bar, and pretending she doesn't even know I'm there. Bartender down at the other end of the bar with a foot on a box of pop bottles casts a glance down this way and does not move. Whore with red flaming hair and a large mole beside her mouth chewing gum and wiggling her necklace with long tapered fingers. Watching me from the corner of her eyes. Jaw going up and down like a dozing cow.

"Beat it will you!"

Her face stretched into a blank dumb stare. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yeah, beat it!"

"Hey! Who do you think you are?"

"Just fuck off baby, fuck off!"

Bartender moving slowly down the bar, sliding a damp cloth on the black marble. A couple of business men at the other end, watching.

"Is there something wrong?"

Whore trying to look innocent and offended, managing to look choleric instead.

"There will be unless you tell her to get away from me!"

"If you don't like it, you move!"

"Yeah! Why don't you move?"

"If she isn't out of my sight in half a minute I'll tear this joint to pieces."

Bartender taking a deep breath, eyes going back and forth like windshield wipers. Making a decision.

"All right Rosie. Do as the man says."

"Hey Harry!"

"Go on Rosie, I don't want any trouble, and neither do you."

Rose got down with a huff, threw her head back and cursed at Steve under her breath.

One thing women can't affect is pride. They might feel it but can't look it. Pride is one thing that just isn't physically possible for them. They just aren't built for it. And Myra was a great one for trying it. And a great champion of equality. Look Myra as far as I know women were created just to relieve men from the burden of bearing children and just so that men wouldn't decide not to bother to fertilize their eggs they were made attractive. So as far as I'm concerned once they stop bearing children and being attractive women are just not of any use. So what's this equality bit?

But I think we are playing right into their hands. It won't be long and they will have us screw into glass tubes. Progress comes with a question mark. But I'll be gone by then and pity for those who come after me for I just made the hole a little bigger. Just as those who came before left it a little bigger for me. And someday, God or no God, the blasted grave will have to cave in. If anything I should apply myself to making it cave in a little sooner. And so died Samson and the Philistines!

Aris came in beaming, face like a luminous watch still glowing with sunshine, hopped onto the stool where the broad had been sitting and hung his arm around Steve's neck.

"You know that little Sebring bug of mine will do one hundred and sixty-five miles an hour? Scotch and soda please. Hundred and sixty-five miles an hour. Wheeee! I went past a cruiser so fast he thought he was in reverse. Slammed the brakes on he did, instead of stepping on the gas he was so excited, and piled up sixteen cars over him. Bang bang bang! Heeee-hee. Can you imagine? Yeah I did honest! I just let it rip! I figure if anybody can catch me Sara can bail me out. Oh she's a sweet girl she

is! Steve my boy I love her! I mean I really do! Now I finally know what love is."

"Great Aris, just great. I knew you'd hitch on to the express. I kind of wish I could."

"What's this story about you going to Greece?"

"I'm practically there."

Aris leaning, head snapping back to get a wide angle view of Stephen. "Oh come on pal! What kind of a stunt are you pulling? You aren't really serious about going to live in a cave and all that?"

"Aris my friend I just have to. The dark hour is about. Darkness moves upon the face of the earth!"

"Oh, come, shit! Better days ahead. I'll keep an eye open for you, maybe get you set up with some of Sara's younger acquaintances. Besides you've got some money now, and I can always help out until I get you fixed up. I'll have connections soon."

Steve stirring the highball around in circles, watching it with an empty smile.

"I have to try it Aris. I just have to go. Just do me a favour will you."

"Name it boy!"

"I'll leave the car here. . . ."

"What car?"

"Myra's car. She's left."

"Where the hell did she go?"

"To Jerusalem."

"You're kidding!"

"Honest to God. Anyway she gave me the car. Now I couldn't sell it this morning, I didn't feel like being chiselled by some bright jerk on Danforth, so if you sell it for me and keep the money, maybe deposit it in a bank in case I want to come back someday."

Stephen's head hanging sadly in the soft light and piped music.

"I don't believe anything anymore Aris. I've got to be prepared for almost anything nowadays. No confidence at all."

"Cheer up Steve. Here have another drink. Think it over for a while. What's the rush anyway? I mean you can still go to Greece in a week. Let me try to set you up huh?"

"No thanks. I just got out of a lousy deal like that. I won't sell myself anymore."

"Oh come on! Who's talking about selling anything? It's just a straight trade. You make it sound a bit like Faust."

"In a way we are all cheap Fausts. Real cheap ones."

"Oh hell!"

Both of them with hanging heads now, glasses swiveling on the smooth marble, a pair of economy class Fausts. Aristides bails out instantly. "Come on! Let's go for a ride!"

"Where?"

"Anywhere, come on."

Driving didn't help though. Steve sat slumped in his bucket seat staring ahead idly as though his mental processes had come to an end. Every time Aris would cast a glance at him he would grip the steering wheel a bit tighter, take a deep sigh and speed up a little.

It wasn't long before they were speeding along 401 in the direction of the airport.

"Hey where are you taking me anyway?"

"I'm going to dump you off at the airport, and hope never to see you again." Steve looked puzzled. "God I hope I never ever see you again. You really are a creepy fellow Stephen. Do you have any idea what there is about you that I like? There must be something."

"Slow down will you!"

"Not a chance. I wanna get there right now, say goodbye and never look back."

"Slow down or I'll hit you over the head with my Bible and toothbrush."

"Go ahead!"

"We will crack up!"

"Just go ahead!"

"All right, but to be fair you must know that I have nothing to lose, while you have. Now anyway."

"True. A life of ease and comfort. Could have been yours!" Aris slowed down.

"She'll dump you as soon as you start depending on it. All she wants is to see you crawling the way she had to. I guess that's what everybody really wants, comfort for their miseries and failures from knowledge of greater miseries and failures. No wonder this fucking world isn't getting any better! Everybody is trying to make it just a little more depraved than himself in order to make his existence bearable if not altogether virtuous. And not only on the personal level. Communism glorifies itself on the faults of capitalism, and capitalism of course finds abundant self-motivation in the failures and excesses of communism. It goes on all the time, between people, nations and races. Every evil is related to some greater evil until one's own evil seems not only preferable but altogether admirable."

Aris gave him a wry expression. "So what? Who the hell cares? I don't give a damn about this world or the next if there is one."

"I don't give a damn about the next either to tell you the truth. It's this one here that bothers me. There must be something either beautiful or grandiose about it. Something grandiose whether absurd, evil or beautiful. But I'm so unable to escape the smallness of me that I can never find out. And I want to find out Aris, I just have to."

"Suit yourself. If you want my opinion it's a waste of time. Unless you enjoy it. I suspect that you do. Some search for light, some for darkness. I guess you enjoy the darkness."

"You've got it wrong Aris. The truth is that I just don't want to delude myself, like you, Myra and Lady Sara Russell. I'm not going to wave any flags, I'm going to tear them all down, including my own as soon as I know how. Especially my own."

"Sounds like suicide to me."

"Ah-aaah-aah! You aren't getting it at all Aris. I can see it now. That would be all right if I wanted out, but I want IN Aris. I want IN. I want to be right in the middle of it, beyond justification, reasons or cause. To be aware of neither God nor death but of myself. Of life. It is only then that God will understand his creation, because only then will it be complete, and then, only then, He will be able to judge Himself. He may commit suicide then."

"Eec-ee eeh!"

"Up to now man has been struggling with two realities. One is that he is a creation of God, and that seems to be good, and the other one implied by the same, that therefore he is not God. . . ."

Aris put his hand on Steve's head, he looked at him constricted with pain. "Do me a favour Steve, cut it out will you. I haven't twisted my mind like that since High School. I thought everybody left stuff like that either there or in a whore house."

"I've never been to High School."

"You must have been in a whore house though!"

"Yeah, that's where I got my degree. I lived for three months one summer in an old Ford behind a cat house. An old Ford with cement blocks instead of wheels and a little chimney sticking out of the roof. They would let me in for breakfast, around two o'clock in the afternoon. And I would sit there eating doughnuts and coffee and take down notes of their conversations. Some dillies I tell you."

"I have heard waitresses talk, I never thought I could blush, so I can imagine."

"Maybe you can, anyway take it from me, they know of another world. Or a completely different perspective of the same one. Felt like an alien and after a while I had to leave because I was beginning to suffer homesickness if you can imagine. They were good kids though, once in a while when business was slow they

would give me a free ride and I would say a prayer for their souls. One of them had a plastic tube with a little electric motor in it and a feather twirling inside. She'd plug it in, stick my doo-dad in and speed up the work of nature. Guaranteed to achieve erection within thirty seconds. Made in West Germany. It really did work. Very handy on a busy day I was told. Time is of the essence."

Twelve

Aris dropped him off at the departure level. He was anxious to leave him, they grinned at each other and shook hands.

Steve checked in at the airline counter, had lunch in the restaurant and sat down on a green leatherette bench to read a book about the mercenaries in the Congo. He just opened the book at random and began to read:

... We were in an open field, nine of us working over this coon. We had him over an oil drum, belly up, Bill, Neb and I working on his legs, holding them down like planks and crashing our boots on them, Red O'Neil and Enrich kicking in his rib cage and the other holding his arms and head. Louis Norada, a good-looking kid from Portugal was working on his fingers, twisting and breaking them while helping to hold on to the coon. He was going about it so methodically and conscientiously, checking each finger as he went along to see that he hadn't missed one. The coon yelled like mad for a while, always a few yells behind because there were so many bones cracking, and then after a while he quit. By that time of course we were finding it difficult to go on with it, breaking every bone in a man's body isn't easy. It was kind of hard to get the unbroken parts to stand up against the pressure of our boots. We would hit it hard only to have the leg bend where there was a break already, so we quit, a little reluctantly but we quit. It was chowtime anyway and we had worked up a good appetite. . . .

Stephen let the book fall to the floor and concentrated on the nauseating feeling coming up like smoke

from his burning guts. That's it! Be sick! Be sick! Vomit right here! he kept telling himself, using the feed-back technique, but instead his eyes became hot and damp and a white impotent fury got caught within his lungs like a wild beast. People sitting and dozing were startled by the eerie scream and they watched fearfully as he ran out of the building swinging a blue flight bag over his screaming head.

Thirteen

He remembered the house. She had pointed it out to him with cheerless pride. A small building of stones and bricks, with bay windows, porches, heavy trim and a steep cedar-shingled roof. Its line suggesting a conscious effort to accommodate in its structure both nature and man, and thus achieving a degree of harmony and an awareness of shelter and comfort not from defiance but assent. Yet the very roof whose lines guided the eye to a simple fusion of confidence and submission, is now dominated by the straight, cubic, high-rise apartment building. It looms high and massive, rising in a never changing pattern as if in a process of self-reproduction. Floor after floor, until for no more understandable a reason than its prodigious growth, it stops there abruptly and dramatically. Frozen in its own dynamic force as an incomplete statement of man's changing mood. Others beside it share the same redundant urge and the same inexplicably arresting fate. Their flat horizontal roofline neither defiant nor submissive but heedless of both nature and man.

She wanted me to have tea with her, and I think I had murder in my heart. Like now maybe. I'm going to try and kill her Jesus, just for you! Goddamn Jesus I'm going to try! Something absurd and senseless like that might make sense.

Stephen up the porch steps. Stops and tilts his head like listening to faint faraway sounds. Mirages of thoughts going through his mind like newsreels projected into clear undulating water. A bit of propaganda on behalf of humanity and her, showing man's great accomplishments from the wheel to the bubble chamber and

discovering the DNA molecule. Men at work with yellow helmets, turning rivers, joining oceans and riding giant earth-moving machines in pulsating dusty clouds and desolate manscapes. Rockets soaring and the super-structures of ocean-going vessels gliding across orchards and fields. And here, crowds surging through the streets, pouring into a square. An angry crowd. Their chant rising in anger and growing into a mighty beat, heaving waves of passion into the deep widening chasm of contempt. Shouting peace! Peace! In anger. A magic unifying rhythm of hopelessness held together by subconscious roots of hate pressing at the gates of a nation of Judases. Then suddenly the rhythm is broken, a tremor of terror sweeps over the multitude as the forces of lunacy and the mandate of contempt are unleashed at the weak fibre of hope. The crowd splits and shrinks and sways as if suddenly ablaze, flames driven by a swirling wind that tatters and gapes the thin tissue of piety. There are screams and flashing lights and throbbing, rushing, widening gaps of littered pavement appearing as the mob is attacked in spasmodic bursts, and the same gaps are filled in again and again, each time with less force and conviction as fear and hate swell and wane. Now terror and bitterness match the horror of the soul and the dark gulf of comfort is stained with blood like the altar of a stoney bloodthirsty God.

"Oh! Hello! Come in, come in young man! It's so nice to see you again."

And the high priests of the country of Judases pacify the God and wash the blood off the stone, point spears at the sky and count the dead so that if you're six feet tall and good at putting a puck into a net you may justly become rich and famous and not fall prey to that great deceiver from Nazareth. And then man will of course conquer space, and there will be prophylactics in heaven.

"Please sit down won't you. No here, here you will be more comfortable. I'll put some water on for tea. You

will have some won't you. Of course you will, you look tired. You don't look well. Tea will do you good. Just sit there and rest."

And the media a great smother, a solid state vaginal muzzle disseminating misery, electronic Promethean self-serve curse with the claws of Vietnam or Biafra as close as the flick of a switch. The extent of my impotence revealed completely now via satellite. Here media! Eat my gizzards!

"I won't be a moment. Do smoke if you wish, there is an ashtray there beside you. . . . You're welcome."

Really a sweet little lady.

So Stephen you think you are going to have the guts to do it?

I don't know!

That's what you came here for, to kill her. Didn't you?

Uh-uh! To find out.

Like hell!

Honest to God!

Eeeh-ee eh. And three quarters!

True nevertheless.

I know you came here to kill her, you are going to pick up that heavy waterball with the quaint snow scene, and sneak up on her and smash her head in. She's going to buckle down as though her legs had disappeared, maybe an eye popped out of its socket from the blow and then lie there oozing blood like a spilled bottle. And then you are going to feel tragic, make some smarr theatrical moves. Like kneeling beside her maybe try to replace her eyeball, lift her head with pity and hear the jagged bones make a noise like a lugubrious rattler. Then maybe you are going to notice the blood on your hands, eeecehhhh! God! Stare at them, and a strange light in your face, dramatically lift your eyes and extend your bloody hands so that God and Son can see them and be ashamed.

Uh-uh. I came to find out. Just as I said.

"Here we are!" She came in carrying a tray. A small woman with quick segmented movements and friendly mockery in her eyes. She places the tray on the table beside Stephen, pours the tea and Stephen helps himself to the sugar and cookies. She sits across from him on a faded velvet chair, and watches him with a smile. "Drink it, drink it, it will do you good. Poor boy you really look all in."

"Yes thanks, I'm a little tired."

She watches him with strange affection. She has a small sharp face and her silver hair is combed straight back into a large bun like a pigeon's tail. He looks at her head and can't help imagining the brittle bone splintering under the scalp until he feels teeth sinking in his stomach.

"Why did you run away the other day?"

"I was a bit upset. I'm sorry I did that."

"Oh you poor thing, you must have had a hard time!"

"Yes, a little."

"I can imagine. Young people have a hard time."

"I guess."

"I had a boy just like you."

"Oh?"

"Yes. He died in the Second World War."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"He was so young. So foolishly young."

Stephen pinching his pants, a little uncomfortable, avoiding her eyes and smile.

"He simply had to go. I couldn't understand him at all then. We just couldn't communicate. He was so shy, how do you say, an introvert. Kept all his problems to himself. Now it is different."

"Now?"

"Yes, but drink your tea. Now we have nice long talks."

"You do! I mean you do?"

"Oh yes, yes yes! And other young men like you. They are happy now. Peaceful."

She tilted her head and beamed an inward smile. "So peaceful now."

"I'm sure."

"Very soon I'll be able to join him. It will be so nice."

"Yes, so nice. *Very soon.*"

Stephen picked the waterball up from the table. I think I'll do it now Jesus. Just you watch. It seemed enormously heavy. He held it up and tried to focus his eyes on the flakes of snow that swirled slowly around a log cabin. He looked at her and had to squint because her image seemed out of focus and waving fluidly in front of him. He tried to get up but an enormous nauseating feeling seemed to weigh him down. She

watched amused at his puzzled expression. He tried again dumbfounded.

"Don't try to get up. You will be fine in a few minutes"

Her squeaky voice seemed to travel laboriously through miles of liquid air. He tried to say something but his parched mouth felt as though it had just ceased to belong to him, and his jaw fell open and he realized he wasn't even going to try to shut it, nor did he care to. It was a strange sensation. He felt as though his senses were suddenly spread through miles of space, his feet unreachably distant. All his senses seemed to retract from his body like rays of light, receding back to his mind, which began to feel brilliantly aware but isolated, unable to respond, unwilling to make an effort. The slightest effort.

"You will be better soon. It won't be long. It won't be long now, you poor boy," she was saying in a comforting voice.

He saw her get up, move smiling over to him, and saw her caress his face though he could not be sure he felt anything.

"You see I have put some poison in your tea." She

looked at the empty cup and she seemed satisfied. "You will be fine in a minute. It will be all over. All over! All over, my dear boy! You will have peace!"

"Eeeh-eeeh!"

"You laugh!"

He was glad she had said it. He wasn't sure it had come out of him. But he had laughed. That's all that seemed to matter at the moment, and that moment he knew belonged to him, only to him. It was his moment. Totally his, and therefore as good as an eternity. And he had laughed at it.

Fourteen

Heee-heee! Ouch!

Great Manito I'm laughing again! Then it was all true! Life goes on after death. Oh Lord forgive me! And where am I? Not paradise I know. Can't expect that nosirree. I'll take what I deserve and not a beep. Be nice though, great grassy plains and never ending herds of buffalo! Or did the white man get here before me? Can I open one eye now? Just one quick glance. No better be patient Steve, take these moments to do a little soul searching, repent! Repent! That's it!

Lord I repent. Instantly. I'm sorry I doubted You and yelled at you sometimes. I cursed You I know. Please accept my apologies. I merely wanted to provoke You, to see if You were there. I had no right though, I take it all back. I really like You, I'm sorry I had my doubts. I really am! I'm sorry that I tried to upset You just so that You would give me a little sign. Gnawing doubt I guess. Believe You me when you are down there you really need a little sign some times. Ooooo boy did I need it at times. I didn't expect anything too fancy, mind you, no angels singing or comets nor Gabriel in person, I just thought that if I swore at You hard enough maybe You could have given me a quick thrombosis or something like that. Nothing too elaborate as I said just a little sign, maybe cripple me. I would have been so happy oh Lord. Really. I'm just saying this because I want You to know that I didn't mean to ask too much, and that I'm sorry even for that. I want You to feel free to punish me if you must. Just give it to me Lord, I won't mind a bit! Heee-hee I won't mind at all now that I know that everybody else is gonna get it for

sure. I guess that is what really bothered me, thinking that, if by chance, You weren't here, those bastards would get away with it while us suckers were being good boys because we were so damned scared of damnation.

"Lord have mercy on my soul!"

"Steve."

Oh, an angelic voice from without!

"Yes my angel."

"How do you feel?"

"Not too good if I may say the truth, but I don't mean to complain. Nosir! I mean I can take anything I deserve, gladly."

"Oh my poor poor darling!"

"It's quite all right I assure you, don't trouble yourself I pray you. I'm quite content. Quite!"

"Oh my sweet darling, how brave and generous."

"Well . . . now that you mention it, I was rather brave and generous in my life. No conceit mind you, just glad that some of my better qualities have not gone unnoticed. But then I should have known that."

"Boo-hoooo-hoooo!"

"Pray don't afflict yourself."

"Bbbbooooo-hooo!"

"I beg your pardon, may I open one eye now and see you?"

"Yes, oooh yes yes my darling!"

"Thank you." My God I'm kind of scared. Everything's foggy. Sounded a bit like Myra, had me worried for a minute.

"If you don't mind I'd like to open the other one too, I can't see very well and I do wish to see you."

"Oh my darling darling."

"You do look a bit like Myra."

"Oh darling, I'm Myra!"

"You are?"

"Yes darling."

"But how can it be? Myra is in Israel!"

"I didn't go darling. After you left me at the airport, I

did some thinking and I realized you had been right on many counts. So I went to the cottage to think things over."

"But how did you get here?"

"As soon as I was told what had happened to you I rushed over here."

"Gosh you needn't have done that!"

"I wanted to be near you. I have never left your side since they brought you here."

"I guess that as an Indian I went third class."

"What do you mean darling?"

"Well hell, you got here before I did apparently, and I'm lying on my back really whacked out believe me."

"Oh Steve darling, you'll soon be all right, believe me."

Stephen able to see clearly now, Myra's face kind of dribbly, lower lip quivering like she was mumbling the rosary.

"Oh Christ!"

"What is it?"

"I don't want to get angry."

"Why, what is it Steve?"

"I'm getting a funny feeling that's what."

"What is wrong darling, what is it?"

"I don't know, something is wrong."

He stared at the ceiling with a strange smile. She looked on trying not to appear too worried and puzzled at his strange behaviour.

"Heee-heeee!"

"What darling?"

"Hee-hee, looked like a light fixture hanging from the ceiling. Silly!"

Myra looked at the light fixture then at Steve and said nothing.

"It does look like a light fixture though, I must say that but anyway Myra I'm sorry for what you did. I didn't know you felt that way about me. Really, I never dreamed you had it in you to rush over here the way

you did. Didn't think you had the pluck."

"Of course I would!"

"All right I'm sorry. I just didn't know that's all."

"Don't worry about it."

"I wish you hadn't in a way, makes me feel kind of indebted to you."

"Please."

"Could I have a drink of water? My throat is very dry."

"No darling, I'm awfully sorry, you aren't supposed to have any."

Eyes of Steve crawling on the ceiling with fear, staring wide open, drawing funnels of fear. She watched him giddily.

"You know Myra," he started with a whisper. "This place . . . you and me here. . . ."

"What? What darling?" she urged him.

"I'm getting the funny feeling that this ain't it! Like this is not where I'm supposed to be. Like something went wrong DAMN IT!"

"Doctor Jones said that you'll be up and around in a day or two," she said reassuringly.

"Doctor Jones?" he said miserably.

"Yes, Doctor Jones!" she reassured him again.

"Oh NOOOOOO!"

She whimpered something, he didn't hear her. His head sagged back and his eyes resumed staring at the ceiling and inside him he felt the old dark enemy stirring, baring his fangs and in a moment his chest was ripped open.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

Myra fled from the room, came back a minute later followed by nurses and interns.

"Now now what seems to be the problem?" asked one looking down at Steve.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHH!"

"SHHHHHH!"

"HAAAAAAH-HAAAAAAH!"

"SSHHHHHHH-SSHHHHH!"

"DAMN YOU! DAMN YOU!"

"NOW NOW!"

"DAMN YOOOOOOOOOU!"

And another pretty nurse rushed in with a syringe, but before she could get at him Steve was up on the bed, bouncing up and down and they trying to catch his legs, took a couple of trampoline hops to gain height, right up to the ceiling, and then flew over their heads landing with a thump and disappeared down the corridor mini-gown flapping open behind him.

Down the stairs half-naked and half-wild. Wings of the forebears on his Huron feet. Taking four steps at a time, toes gripping the cool terrazzo floor and out in the lobby causing a little furor, even a little panic as he swung out of the door knocking a few people down. Still flapping and hopping up University Avenue, in this busy hour, like a wild rabbit loose on a Grey Cup field.

Ran up to College and there with a red light and crowd at the curb, a spirited citizen saw him coming, spread out his arms, shouted, "HEY STOP!" and got his nose smashed in, but not before he got ahold of Steve's mini-gown, and as Steve yanked away the sterilized gown tore off him leaving him for a brief gasping moment naked in the middle of the Presbyterian intersection. Hesitating, not from shame but fear. Afraid and vulnerable, and though some laughed they were relieved when kicking up a burst of speed Stephen quickly disappeared.

Fifteen

Myra found him lying on the chesterfield with a highball balanced on his bare chest. She stood looking down at him, twitching miserably, trying to think of something to say that would not irritate him.

"Steve."

"What?"

"Please Steve, don't scare me like that anymore."

He merely frowned. She waited patiently.

"Would you mind telling me who took me to the hospital."

"The police, they had that kooky old lady under surveillance for a while."

He sighed heavily.

"They suspect she had poisoned others."

She waited again, but still he didn't seem interested.

"Thank God!" she said reflectively.

"Yeah!"

"I brought you your flight bag."

Stephen up on his feet, grabbing the bag from her, unzipping it and checking the contents. Counting the money.

"It's all there," she reassured him.

Steve going to his bedroom followed by Myra. Putting on a checkered shirt.

"Where are you going?"

"Don't hound me Myra, I don't think I can take it right now. I have had a hard day."

"Yes, you are right. I'll leave you alone." She started away.

Stephen squinted suspiciously. "Where are *you* going?"

"I'll go to the cottage for a while. The phone is

connected, you can phone me or come there any time you like. I won't bother you."

"Good. I mean I think it's a good idea. I need to be alone for a while. Meditate. I mean it too, no fooling."

Myra starting away again.

"Hey! I got a better idea. If you don't mind I would like to go to the cottage. I won't wreck it this time I promise."

"But of course!"

"You don't mind?"

"Of course not. I'd rather stay here any day, it's kind of boring being there all alone."

"I think it is the best place for me right now. Sort things out."

"O.K.," she said happily. "Then it is settled. Do you have the car?"

"Yeah! I mean I hope so. I'd better phone Aris right away."

Steve hurried to the phone followed by Myra's pleased gaze. He took the receiver off the hook and just before he started dialing, in a rare impulse of wanting to be liked, he looked at her, smiled and said, "Thank you darling."

sixteen

Myra and Aristides Bowels Buckney to see me off. Myra sustaining a quivering smile over some dark female premonition no doubt. And Aris with a bastard grin of joy. Still laughing at my narrow escape. Took a last look in the rear mirror for the guilt that was in a fleeting thought of uxoricide. Can't stand moping females and their dark premonitions nor the gentle web they spin around you.

Gunned the car out of there, did ninety past Mount Pleasant Cemetery. I don't think I'll ever like cemeteries again even though I would like to sneak into that other one some night with a bottle of gin and a shovel and dig my old friend O'Tim out. Hee-hece! Just his musty skull, shine it up nicely and put it on the bedstand where Myra puts my allowance, or used to. Give her some religion. I think maybe she is losing her grip on money. And if I don't ever see her again I would be much better off still. Beware of females bearing gifts. Her love has the quality of damp smoochy kisses. Then of course, if I could subdue some of my more passé male syndromes, we could have a good go at it. *Yes darling, of course darling, thank you my dear!* Things like that. Call it refinement. Show more affection and appreciation Steve. A few kisses now and then and consideration for the female inferiority complex. Or is it? Emasculate myself a little to help her strive for equality. Reduce the difference that's what. Preserve only what is necessary for intercourse and call it lovemaking. Not fuck. Say fuck Myra! SAY IT! I want to hear you say it. Nosir, so shy. She can't say it. Must work toward demaleization. Can't you say fuck though? Oh darling I can't, it makes me blush. All right Myra I'll compromise this far, but no more, say screw! Can you say screw? A

moment of hushed tension, suspense, then shutting her eyes and puckering her lips she enunciated in a high falsetto voice, *screw*.

NOOOO! NOT LIKE THAT DAMN IT! Like you mean fuck, like blood and guts and arse. Oh shit! I don't want to live in a woman's world. I don't want to adapt or semi-castrate myself. I'd rather die. Yayay. Not that again. I've got to get away. For good. Away. AWAYYYYY!

Turned east on four-o-one and in my heart the flutter of bird wings. AWAY! Drove in silence for a while and then listened to the bloody radio, from south of the border the reading of grim news with evangelical fervour. One hopeful note; a group of American millionaires is making an effort to buy North Vietnam and thus end the war honourably.

Past Oshawa a few miles, and then turned towards Lake Ontario on a dusty and bumpy road. Passed the dilapidated tilted Jenkins farmhouse and stuck a tongue out at his dirty kids sitting on the fence by the road.

Stephen turned the car engine off and sat for a while looking out at the lake and listening to the distant roar of the highway behind him.

This is going to be just fine! Just fine! Oh God . . . it's got to be.

seventeen

In another hour Stephen had all the boxes of groceries stacked in the small kitchen. There must have been enough there for a year.

"Not forty-eight cans of beans?" Myra had exclaimed.

"Yep. I'm fond of beans."

"And twenty-four cans of Libby's spaghetti?"

"Yep. I'm rather fond of spaghetti too."

"How long do you plan to stay then Stephen?" She had a worried look again.

"A few days anyway."

"Well then you don't need that much. There are some groceries left there anyway. Besides, you can always pop up to town if you need something."

"But I don't intend to pop up to town, nosir. I don't want to see a living soul while I'm there. Nosir. Not a living soul. You hear! And don't you phone either. Please Myra, no phoning, OK."

"OK. I won't, I promise. But why so many beans?"

"I get hungry when I'm alone."

"I should say."

Stephen grinning at the pile of groceries. "Christ that's a lot of beans."

Went for a brief slow walk along the beach, under the clay cliffs like a convalescent recuperating from a long illness. Rickets of the soul. Must not do anything too strenuous. And not more than one whoopieee four times a day. Not too much excitement the first day.

And the first night, sleepless night, buried in the dark silence and solitude. God it was dark and quiet. Turned a light on in the kitchen after a while and opened all the windows on the side to the highway to hear the distant

struggle of the truck trailers grinding on the asphalt arteries of civilization. But in the morning woke up fresh and ready, dragged a chair down to the water and sat in it watching the sun swell and gush up from the horizon. Saw the wind sliding over the lake, rippling. And from far out a flock of seagulls come riding high on the wind. Close to shore screaming and breaking their flight to land on the shimmering surface.

And he let the silky breeze feel his presence for a strange affirmation of his solitude, of an isolating awareness that his body, the motion of the wind and the heat of the sun would establish in sense a space.

Alone on the beach, testing the sweet smell of water and decaying seaweed, thinking that for sure this time, he'll give up worrying about the human race.

Every day went for walks along the marsh feeling like a poet, heart caught in the irons of the mind. Scared some cottontails down the path and in the pond saw the beaver unzip with his nose the still reflection of the sky. The heron slide down to stand on one leg in the shallow water. From Jenkins' farm that wisecrack of a rooster crowing its forced awakening sound vertically in the air. And in the evening watching the sun go down behind the rising fields and over the glowing horizon. The sky catching fire and a confused wind blowing about irresolutely. The crows leaving the grain fields, lifting and fluttering in a high spiral, like bits of burnt paper blown up by the heat of the fire that night, slowly put out, leaving at last, for a little while longer a thin darkening cinder under the smouldering grey. Back to the cottage at night, telling himself he would never go back. No, never! Not even to the highway to buy a hamburger at the gasoline station. Not a coke! Nothing. Hermit.

And the next days more of the same. Enjoying the corny beauty of nature. Filled with the purple of dawn and the glowing moonlight. Growing restless. Was happiness really born a twin? A feeling of emptiness in all this charming beauty and peace. Started getting up later,

missing the dawn and the beaver in the pond. But carrying on a conversation with himself, monotonously at first but then developing into a dialogue for two voices. A high pitched one and his own. A thing which he lived to regret because the high pitch of it irritated him no end. Also it soon became too arrogant.

"What are you going to do today Stephen?"

"Go for a walk. Then I'll have a little swim and maybe collect some coloured stones."

"Hee-hee-heeeeee!"

"What's so funny?"

"Collect coloured stones. Eeeechheee!"

"Oh shut up!"

"And what are you going to have for lunch?"

"Pork and beans."

"Not again?"

"Sure, they're delicious."

"I would rather have bacon and eggs. Are there any more eggs?"

"No, no bacon either."

"I want bacon and eggs!"

"You can go to hell!"

"You'll have to go to town sometime. Why don't you go today and then we can have bacon and eggs."

"I'll not go to town and that's that."

"What when the beans run out, what then Steve boy, you'll have to go to town then!"

"I don't want to see a human being do you hear. Not one. I'll write to the grocery store, send them a list and tell them to deliver it when I'm not here."

"Hey, that's a good idea. I must admit."

"Not bad indeed!"

"And what will you do when the money runs out?"

"Shut up will you! Just shut up!"

"There is only one bottle of gin left you know!"

And that day, great billowing clouds gathered ominously over the cottage and started to pour rain and shake the cottage with tremendous thunder claps. Listened to

the rain all night, on the roof, going tock-tock. Shit. Towards morning weak, tired and restless staring at the grey ceiling and starting to see things. What the hell is this anyway the Sistine chapel? Is that me and God coming at me with a finger? Watch it now! Watch it! That's not where! And still coming at my behind with his finger, and me lifeless watching him come at me for the moment of creation up my arse. Ouch! And then he backs away and comes at me again. Oh Lord not again. For Pete's sake don't create me again. And again he did. Ouch! Now hell! I've got to hand it to you God. I've really got to hand it to you! Through your infinite wisdom, your fantastic mercy and insatiable love you have fucked me again.

Stephen up on his elbows, staring right through the ceiling pouting his mouth to spit. "Poooch!" and yelled.

"YOU HAVE FUCKED ME AGAAAAIN!"

"OH LORD!"

"OH LORD!"

Got up, tiptoed to the living-room and smashed the old radio with the driftwood lamp. Bang! Bang! Stood grinning, looking at the smashed pieces and the lamp hanging loosely from his hand.

"Now what in tarnation did you do that for?"

"It was bugging me!"

"Getting weak eh! Afraid that you might turn it on just to hear what's going on out there?"

"No. It was just bugging me for a couple of days."

"Now what are you going to do with that bottle of gin?"

"I'm going to have a drink! That's what."

"Christ if someone saw you now! You look a mess."

"So what!"

"If you are thinking of going back to Toronto I suggest you wash and shave. You'd give Myra a fit."

"Eeeeh-eeeh!"

"Seriously Steve, if you are thinking of going back, you'd better not drink."

"But I'm not damn you. I'm not going back."

"Oh yes you are Stephen. You might as well admit it. Outside of hating humanity and doubting God what is there? Collecting stones? Butterflies? Watching the dawn?"

"I hate people!"

"That's the spirit Steve! Go hate them!"

"I don't want to."

"Is that why you don't want to go back? Because you don't want to hate people?"

"Oh come on! You know better than that."

"Maybe you don't even want to hate Myra"

"Oh shit!"

"Think about it Stephen. Think! Even if you don't give a damn about God, don't betray Jesus. He was a swell guy he was. Go back, Stephen, don't hide, go back and hate them. Sockittohem Steve. Attaboy Steve, drink this bloody bottle up and then go give it to them."

"Shut up! SHUT UP!"

"Come on Steve, don't get mad at me. You aren't going to get out of it. You know I'm spelling it out for you just like it is. You got to go back Steve. That's it, have another drink. Attoboy, now you are getting it. Feel that burning inside! What is it? Hate? Isn't it? It is. It is! Good boy Steve. That's the old spirit. You can't betray Him, right?"

Took another gulp and tore out into the rain and darkness, yelling like a madman. Ran in and out of the lake then ran back inside hopping up and down dripping wet and shaking the whole cottage. Yelling, I won't go back. World's full of shit, yeah-yeah-yeah. Don't give a damn, yeah-yeah-yeah!

Ripped out of the cottage again yelling, "Goddamn it!" Ready to jump into the lake again but froze in his tracks by the faint sound of Jenkins' cock crowing. Came back with a shattered fearful look on his face. Dressed furiously and grabbed a bunch of strings, shoelaces and elastics from the kitchen drawers. Walked up to the car, kneeled in the rain and took the fancy hubcaps off the wheels. Tied two together with bits of string and shoelaces and wore them after a few fittings, one on his chest and one on his back.

One more tied on his head.

Rain making a loud sound. Started up the field fierce. And indeed I tell you I shall not betray you before the cock crows thrice.

Eyes adrift and legs wading, water in my shoe making a sucking noise. A knight up a field, wearing G.M. armour. Advancing with clenched fists and terrifying eyes. Lightning shining on the chromed helmet and impressing a puntillated landscape in his eyes. Going to kill that sonofabitch. How dare he mock me! I'm the sacred beast. Run for cover you scheckels. I'm coming back! The sacred beast is not dead yet. I'm not dead yet and you keep the distance of the hyena from the body of the lion that is still throbbing with life, and fear the day that brings the mighty warrior to another feat, to another dragon to be slain! Lightning blue flashes and a grey darkness about, jumping over a puddle and the armour makes it difficult, approaching the chicken-house. Sneaking inside gripping a shovel like a two-handed sword. Dark like hell in here and a fearful cackle swaying, dividing before me, curling and rolling along the wall and then suddenly in the dark the frightened cock crowed a quickie for the dignity that was in it. Shh-shut up you sonofabitch! Where are you?

Bumping into the wall, more loud cackle and the sonofabitch starting to crow again. Swinging the shovel with mighty anger and an explosion of chickens. Swung again and again squashing some chickens to the ground. Wings hit him on the face flapping against the walls. Took one baseball swing to hit some in mid-air and collided with something tremendously hard which blasted the shovel from his hands and collapsed the whole roof. The rest of the rickety old frame moaned and creaked for a minute then crumbled down on him.

Stephen crawled out of a mess of chickens and chicken shit, bloody feathers stuck on his face and hands and heard old Jenkins yelling from a window upstairs and then the loud bang of a twelve-gauge shotgun.

Bird shot clanging on the metal roof, as he ran across

the yard, over the fence and hid in the bullrushes.

Heard Farmer Jenkins and the kids yelling in the yard, what was it Bob? I dunno! I saw him! I saw him! T'was a great big monster with a shiny head and one arm sticking out of his ear! Go on! T'was so! I saw him! Aaahh!

And later on the four-o-one, they saw a wild madman with a hubcap on his head, driving in the rain with the top down, swinging a fist over his head and singing, "Has anybody seen my Jesus?"